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Cover photo: Fragment of the mural. Keshikchidag monastery. Azerbaijan

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PREFACE to the English Edition

The 2018 publication of the first edition of this book marked a watershed moment in the history and archaeology of Central Asia for a number of reasons. First, it highlighted significant new understanding that Christianity played in the formation of the Silk Road prior to the rise of Islam, based on a reassessment of old data in the light of new discoveries. Second, it showcased how international cooperation and interreligious dialogue could advance our scientific knowledge, overcoming politics and strongly held assumptions. Third, it was the final major project of the late Dr. Karl Baipakov (1940-2018), who will always be remembered as a pioneer in Central Asian archaeology; indeed, his passion, scholarship, and insights have prepared a new generation of scholars and scientists in pursuit of historical facts and maintaining ancient sites. His work not only provided a legacy to his home country of Kazakhstan, but was a gift to the global academic community. It is in his memory we dedicate this current English edition. Our editorial team was led by Dr. Dmitriy Voyakin, who served as the project director, and the gifted Ms. Zarina Kudabayeva, who labored as the main translator. I must thank Dr. Steven Gilbert who provided additional editorial support.

As the English-language editor, I was charged with a myriad of duties. Foremost, I needed to make sure that the explicit and connotative message of the Russian text was conveyed in English terms; however, I was also cognizant that many scholars around the world would be reading this book, and for them English is their second language. That is why I preferred a basic form of English and retained the literal translation for most passages. The vocabulary of Central Asian archaeology has its own peculiar jargon and methods which forced me to rearrange some sentences for the sake of clarity, sometimes including additional clauses or definitions for specific forms (such as *kairak*, *shahristan*, *sufa*, *chiraq*, *khachdash*, etc.). It was important to preserve local terms since they reflect the unique characteristics of the region. Fortunately in difficult passages where descriptions of architecture and archaeological forms were ambiguous, I was able to consult the referenced publications or images provided. Sometimes it was necessary,however, to add phrases so that a sentence could be made sensible in English; in those cases, these were

indicated by the use of brackets [] and footnotes. While I recognize that the many medieval Christians living in Central Asia would have spoke or known Syriac, I chose terminology common to academic scholarship, since I assume that English would be understood by more readers; so for example, I used *church* instead of *knutšā*, *tomb* for *qabrā*, *altar* for *'lātā*, etc.

Wherever possible I checked the materials cited in references. In some instances publications were inaccessible to me, particularly Soviet-era periodicals. Keep in mind that this work was conducted throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic in which travel was restricted and research libraries were closed. There were several entries missing from the first edition's bibliography, and these are now included. We also added three chapters that were planned for the first edition, covering Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as our excavations at Usharal-*Ilibalyk*, as a case study. Admittedly, the latter's form and content is unlike the other chapters since it is site-specific rather than a national survey; however, it complemented the preceeding chapter on Kazakhstan and, since the site is near the border of Xinjiang, China, it provides some glimpse into the Christian history of the Ili Valley region.

I should also mention that the overall tone of this translation, when appropriate, sought to reflect the positive attitude and collegiality that I experienced during the international UNESCO conference titled "Religions of Kazakhstan and Central Asia on the Great Silk Road" on 12 June 2017 in Almaty, which was chaired by Dr. Baipakov and served as a precursor to this book. Other conferences have been held since that time, continuing that same spirit, such as the 6th University of Salzburg International Conference on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia (in June 2019 at Almaty, Kazakhstan) as well the 2nd Second International Conference on Central Asian Archaeology held at the University of Bern, Switzerland (in February 2020). Readers are encouraged to read the resulting publications of those conferences since they also further advance this field of study.

Finally, it must be stated that each chapter embodies the views and personal scholarship of the authors rather than the editorial team. In some cases, we strongly disagreed with the interpretation of the author but, nevertheless, felt that their perspective was important for the international community to read and understand. Because this book is published through The International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) and UNESCO, it is intended to encourage cross-cultural dialogue and promote peace. Ironically, as I was editing the final chapter on Azerbaijan, the so-called 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War was raging—exactly where the majority of the monuments, mentioned in that chapter, are located. Indeed, an inextricable component of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been the interpretation of religious history and archaeology.

Among English-speaking scholars, the Armenian (and Georgian) perspective is more accessible; whereas the Azerbaijani view is less known or understood. Important research has been carried out by Azerbaijani archaeologists and their work deserves to be considered by the international scholarly community. That is why I have refrained from questioning or critiquing the text, even where I could have offered a counterperspective that reflects the consensus of international scholars. My footnotes in that chapter were not intended to "correct" the authors, but simply provide a wider context that is more familiar with English-speaking scholars. I encourage each reader to draw their own conclusions according to their own research into each monument.

No doubt some decisions I made will not please everyone, but I can honestly say that I tried to provide the best possible editon given the resources at hand. If there are any grammtical errors or interpretative inaccuracies, I accept all the blame. Having "wrestled" with this text over the past five years, I have learned to appreciate the expertise and dedication of each author; so on behalf of the entire editorial team, I must express the warmest gratitutde for their significant contribution that furthers our cultural and scientific knowledge.

Charles Anthony Stewart
(Kansas, United States)

INTRODUCTION

Christianity began to spread in the territory of Central Asia in the first half of the first millennium A.D and established itself as a world religion. The history of propagation of its doctrine is closely connected with the history of the Christian church, and with the political and cultural history of the peoples of the Middle East and especially Iran. As noted by V. V. Bartold, in his summary of Christianity in the ancient and medieval Turkestan, trade routes played a vital role in the spread of various religions, including Christianity. This is confirmed by both written and archaeological sources (Bartold 1964, p. 280–286; Gritsina 2011). As known, routes of the Silk Road crossed the territory of Central Asia in many directions (*Formation and development of routes* ..., 1990).

Apparently, Jewish communities appeared in Central Asia, back in the era of the Achaemenids, although there is still not enough archaeological evidence for the existence of Judaism here.

The worldview of this religion is documented by written sources and a few archaeological data obtained from the territory of the Khazar Khaganate that covered the lands of modern northwest Kazakhstan. The archaeological material that relates to the Khazars and monuments of Central Asia, hardly identifies the signs of Judaism (see first chapter by Baipakov and Ternovaya, this volume). However, there was an attempt to determine a religious building excavated at the Kalai Kakhkakh ancient settlement in shakhristan (Tajikistan), as a synagogue (Negmatov, Avzalov, Mamadzhanova 1987, p. 177–210). The following facts were the basis for this identification: the location of a niche above the floor, which could serve to store sacred scrolls; its direction towards Jerusalem; that lateral location of the entrance and seats of honor along the side wall, etc. All these are characteristics of synagogues; however, the author himself believes that the question remains open (Khmelnitsky 1989, p. 65–66).

Nestorian Christianity was the main Christian organization in Central Asia and had already experienced several periods of growth and decline in its early stages due to various political developments. Two of them significantly influenced the entire course of its expansion. In 431, the Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus, recognized Nestorianism as heresy, and a large stream of Nestorians movedeastward, significantly pressing the Melkite

Christians who had settled in the area a little earlier. According to researchers, the Orthodox Melkites owned a small monastery in Merv, which existed from the 4th to the 6th centuries and it was abandoned as a result of pressure from the Nestorians (Dresvyanskaya 1968. p. 12). It is possible that some of the Melkite Christians migrated along the ancient caravan road from Merv and settled in Khorezm.

The Nestorians, having a prevailing position, formed the so-called “Nestorian empire”, a significant part of which was covered by the Central Asian interfluves and adjacent territories (Vladimir 2011).

In Sogdia, the evidence of Christianity has been traced long before the first mention of the arrival of missionaries. Scientists believe that by the 3rd century, Christians had arrived in Sogdian Bactria (Bogomolov, Buryakov, Zhukova and others 1994, p. 12).

According to legend, reflected in some sources, the body of the Apostle and Evangelist Matthew was brought from Syria and buried by fugitive Christians in the 2nd or 3rd centuries near Issyk-Kul Lake (Baipakov and Ploskikh 2003, p. 80; Vladimir 2011). When moving to the region of Semirechye, they could not bypass the territory of Transoxiana.

The grave of Patriarch Job, whom Muslims call Aiyub, is still venerated by Christians in the region of Khorezm – in the city of Urgench.

The formation of the Turkic Kaganate resulted in stabilized political situation in Central Asia and led to the revival of the international trade along the caravan routes and arising of conditions favourable for the missionary activity of the Nestorian church. The ideas of Christianity penetrated the nomadic environment. According to sources, Patriarch Yeshuyab II (628–643) contributed to the creation of metropolises in a number of cities, including Samarkand. This is very important, since the creation of a metropolis was preceded by a bishopric, which indicates a rather long and stable Christian tradition in Sogdia (Nikitin 1984, p. 124–125).

According to Father Iakim Vladimir, Christianity in Central Asia is of apostolic origin. By tradition, it is believed that the first apostles who entered here were St. Thomas, who was called Didymus and St. Andrew the First-Called. However, it is worth remembering that long before them, Job the Long-suffering ended the life in Khorezm, where his grave has been revered until now (Vladimir 2011).

In the 6th century the Central Asian Church accepted the so-called heresy of Nestorianism. The rise of the Nestorians reached such an extent that they were on the verge of creating a “third type Christian empire” covering all of Asia, different from the Greek Orthodox and Latin Catholic Powers. In the opinion of L. N. Gumilyova, “the thousand-year history of Asia from the Sea of Marmara to the Yellow Sea is the story of the formation and death of the ethno-confessional Nestorian civilization”, and furthermore, “the problem of the disappearance of Nestorianism is so complex that it requires special study” (Gumilyov, 1991). The potent Nestorian Church, that exerted such a great and memorable impact, gradually faded away in just a few decades, in almost all countries

of the Asian continent. In fact, Nestorianism was a kind of counterbalance to the Byzantine Orthodox Church that survived, perhaps, thanks to the "intervention" of ancient Russia, which accepted this faith and prevented its collapse. It is no coincidence that after the cessation of Nestorianism for almost four hundred years, there was not a single recorded Christian community in the territory of Central Asia until it was colonized by the Russian Empire (Vladimir 2011, p. 14).

The expansion of Christianity in Kazakhstan, as well as throughout Central Asia, is closely connected with the political and cultural history of the peoples of Central Asia, the Near East and the Middle East. The Silk Road played an important role, in the 6th–7th centuries its northern routes stretched across the territory of Southern Kazakhstan and Semirechye – where the centers of the Western Turkic Kaganate were located, and where the formation and development of the famous cities of Otrar, Ispidjab, Taraz, Nevaket, and Suyab took place. Throughout this region, there is an evidence of Syriac writing, signifying Syriac Christianity.

This is confirmed by the few, but unique artifacts from South Kazakhstan and Semirechye (Zhetysu): wearable crosses, accessories, inscriptions, and funeral monuments, etc. Among these include: the terracotta icon from Taraz dating to the 5th–6th centuries, the clay vessel from Taraz with Christian (Jacobite) inscribed withthe names of "Peter" and "Gabriel" dating to the 6th–8th centuries, the wearable cross from the necropolis of Kostobe, and the bronze cylinders with the crosses from Talgar (12th – early 13th century) and others. A source written between the 14th to 19th centuries contains a story about Iskhaq Bab, who mentions Christians in the cities of Ispidjab and Sairam.

Archaeological and epigraphic finds together with the data of written sources show a picture of the spread of Christianity in southern Kazakhstan and Semirechye from the 6th to 7th centuries (Baipakov 1994, 100).

Until recently, medieval wearable crosses and various kinds of pendants with Christian symbols were considered rare finds. However, today there is an increase in the number of such finds in various countries of Central Asia. A significant number of them are found in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, they are represented there by a broad spectrum of artifacts, which was possible given the versatility of the cruciform symbol (Kamyshev 2012, p. 83and 113, figs. 6–9).

More widely worn Christian pendants are represented among the finds in the territory of Uzbekistan. At the same time, there are not only crosses, but also images of animals associated with Christianity.[1]

It follows that by the end of the 1st millennia Christianity was one of the practiced religious systems in the Chuy valley. This is evidenced by the Christian monumental buildings in the cities, and in their central location, within the fortress walls (such as the church of Ak-Beshim). Chuy Christians used the Sogdian language and alphabet in

[1] See the section on Uzbekistan in this volume.

everyday life, but on religious objects the inscriptions were made in Syriac letters (as found on gravestones and plaques at Ak-Beshim) (Baipakov and Ternovaya, this volume).

By the beginning of the 2nd millennia, and even for the previous periods, there is no factual data – either in written sourcesor in surviving artifacts – to determine if the geography of Christianity throughout Kyrgyzstan expanded beyond the Chuy valley. In the 12th–13th centuries, the situation changed. On the one hand, the written sources contain information on the influx of a new Christian population embodied in the Qara Khitai and the Naimans who came from the east and northeast. On the other hand, archaeological data indicates a number of significant changes. As lifedeclined in large settlements during the 13th century, Christian artifacts have been found at the periphery, outside their central ruins and on ancient settlements – that is, in the remains of settlements without fortifications. However, the geography expands and extends to include the Issyk-Kul Basin (Kolchenko, this volume).

In Caucasian Albania recognition and the official adoption of Christianity by the state took place in 326, already a year after the adoption and declaration of Christianity as a legal religion in the Roman Empire. After many years of studying the spread of Christianity, dozens of churches have been excavated and explored, starting from the early Middle Ages to the present (Alyshov and Khalilov, this volume).

In this present research the authors provide historical knowledge in several summary essays, as well as information on survived material traces of adherents of Christianity and Manichaeism in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

A. A. Gritsina

Christianity in Southern Kazakhstan and Semirechye (6th–14th centuries)

K. M. Baipakov, G. A. Ternovaya (Kazakhstan)

According to written sources and archaeological data, inhabitants of the medieval cities of Kazakhstan professed various religions, including Christianity. The existence of Judaism does not have enough archaeological evidence. The worldview of this religion is recorded in written sources and some archaeological data obtained from the territory of the Khazar Khaganate. Modern northwestern Kazakhstan was part of the territory controlled by the Khazar Khaganate. The cults and beliefs of the Khazars consisted of common Turkic pagan rituals, such as worshiping the god Tengri and deifying the Khagans. Their tolerant policy enabled monotheistic religions – Christianity and Islam – to enter the Khazar domain. Between the 8th and 10th centuries the ruling clan, and a part of the Khazar people, converted to Judaism. According to texts that record Jewish-Khazar correspondence the choice of Judaism by the Khazars was due to the fact that its doctrines were common to Christianity and Islam (Kokovtsov, 1932). In the opinion of S. P. Tolstov, the Khazar genealogy represented in the book of *Josippon*, provides traditional evidence of Khorezm origin and refers to the initial stage of Jewish migration into Khazaria (Tolstov 1946, p. 106).

It is difficult to identify evidence of Judaism in the archaeological material related to the Khazars. According to experts, it is a challenge to identify Jewish ceremonial rites of the 8th–10th centuries apart from ordinary pit burials. One interesting piece of archaeological evidence emerged regarding the interaction of Tengriism and Judaism, when a destroyed burial site was discovered during the digging of a trench in 1989 in the city of Mariupol (Ukraine). The tomb included skeletal remains, a ceramic vessel and a collection of items. The burial took place no earlier than the 8th century. The nature of the accompanying inventory, among other elements, points to the fact that it was burial fashioned in a kurgan manner. Of particular interest was the molded stucco-ceramic pot with symbols etched on its body. One of them is a cross with arms of equal length, which supposedly served as apotropaic protection; however, there is no reason to associate the image of the cross with the presence of Christianity in the southwestern lands of the Khaganate. The second sign

is the Jewish menorah (seven-branched candlestick) in the form of a rhombus on a stand. There are seven vertical lines drawn at the top of the rhombus. The image has no direct analogues among the decoration of early medieval ceramics of Crimea and the Don region (Kravchenko and Kulbaka 2010, 275–282, Fig. 2). Other random finds at Kerch (Bospor, Ukraine) also testify to Judaism – including gravestones with inscriptions and incised menorahs. They were found within burials, but in secondary contexts (Kashovskaya and Kashayev 2010, pp. 283–304). There is also historical data about the resettlement of Jews from Persia to Turkestan in the 14th century.

In the ideology of the peoples of the ancient and medieval East, Christianity was held in high regard, and retained its position even after the establishment of Islam. The spread of Christianity in Kazakhstan, as well as throughout Central Asia, is closely related to the political and cultural history of the peoples of Central Asia and the Near and Middle East. The Silk Road played an important role; in the 6th–7th centuries its northern route traversed the territory of modern southern Kazakhstan and the region known as Semirechye (Zhetysu) – which was the center of the Western Turkic Khaganate – and this is where the cities of Otrar, Ispidjab, Taraz, Nevaket, Suyab were established and developed. Along this route there is evidence of Syriac writing and Syriac Christianity. The Syriac community's economic enterprises coincided with the impact of their culture on the Arabian Peninsula, and in India, in the regions of Central Asia, where the Iranian and Turkic dialects were to a certain extent influenced by the Syriac language. The expansion of Christianity among the Sogdians, both in the metropolis and in the colonies, led the Sogdians to become acquainted with later Syriac writing. From Sogdian Christians, the Syriac writing spread to the ancient Turks; eventually, this writing was adopted by the Uighurs. Some Iranian dialects used the Syriac alphabet, created after the 8th century, as evidenced by fragments from Turfan. According to N. V. Pigulevskaya, this dialect did not develop from the Sogdian alphabet, but rather Nestorian script of the 10th–11th centuries, borrowed directly from the Syriac community. Syriac-Turkic gravestones from Semirechiye, dating back to the 13th–14th centuries, testify to the influence of Syriac writing on the Turkic tribes, and four kairak-stones found at the Krasnaya Rechka (Kyrgyzstan) are even older. The inscriptions on two kairaks from the citadel are dated to 789 and 909 AD (Livshits 1989, pp. 79–81). This bears testimony to the connections of the Turks with the Syriac-Nestorian culture.

There are fragments of a Syriac manuscripts from Khara-Khoto, the "city of Tanguts", dated to the 13th century – the same city is called *Etzina* by Marco Polo. Some are written in both the Syriac script and language; others are in the Turkic language but transcribed in Syriac letters, while interlaced with Syriac words. This type of mixed writing and language is also known from the Semirechye inscriptions (Pigulevskaya, 1966, pp. 228–232). Semirechye historically was considered as part of East Turkestan. Two main routes connecting Central Asia with the Far East passed through this region: one path led to Aksu and Kucha and another to the Turfan oasis. Christianity spread eastward along the same

tracks. Turkic tribes – the Karluks and the Uighurs – having subjugated these areas, had already found a Christian population here. In Semirechye, where the Karluks established a foothold since the year 766, Christianity received support from the Turkic khagans, who apparently tried to use it as an ideological basis for consolidating the emerging association of states. At the same time, Christianity did not become the sole official religion, coexisting with Manichaeism and Buddhism (Nikitin 1984, pp. 126–127). According to Syriac texts, Patriarch Timothy (780–823) received letters from the kings whom he had converted to Christianity as well as from the Turkic hakan (leader). Nestorian priests converted the Karluk Jabgu to Christianity and brought about the formation of a special Karluk province. Missionary activity of the Nestorian clergy increased under Patriarch Timothy I. In his "Letters" Timothy reports on the conversion to Christianity of "the king of the Turks, who left his old delusions" as well as the conversion of his subjects. This report refers to the Karluks of Semirechye. To propagate Christianity, Timothy sent a missionary, Subhalyeshu, to the Caspian Sea region, who then went deep into Central Asia and reached China, where the Nestorian community founded by Alopen had existed since 636. The ethnonym Karluk (Khallukh) is mentioned in the list of Nestorian metropolitans, compiled by Amr ibn Matta around 1350, which summarizes the entire history of the Nestorian church, and includes Merv, Turkestan, Samarkand, Tangut, Kashgar, Nevaket. Information from Amr ibn Matta and the letters of Timothy allow us to infer that the Karluk Jabgu was a patron of Nestorianism (Klyashtorny 1959, p. 168; Barthold 1964, p. 275). Abu Doulef reported that the Oghuz had a "temple" without images; according to this author, there were a few Christians among the Chigil tribe. Christians were also found in Talas (Taraz). According to M. Narshakhi, when in 893–94 AD the city was overwhelmed by the emir Ismail, the cathedral was turned into a mosque, and the emir of Talas converted to Islam along with many *dehqâns* (landed gentry). The main mosque in the city of Merki (Merke, Kazakhstan) also replaced a previous church; commenting on this, V. V. Barthold clarified that the translation of word in the texts denoting its construction could only correspond to a church or a synagogue (Bartold 1964, pp. 286–287). Such an interpretation does not provide an unambiguous identification of the structure as Christian; perhaps it was referring to a Manichaean church, because written sources mention Manichaeism in the region (Zuyev 2004; Klyashtorny 2006).

In the 12th century Nestorianism had success among some Tatar-Mongol tribes, such as the Keraites. The Persian scientist-encyclopedist Rashid al-Din (1247–1318) in his *Compendium of Chronicles* reports: "They had distinguished rulers from their tribes. At that time, within their borders, they had more strength and power than other tribes. The call of Jesus reached them – peace be upon him! – and they entered into his faith" (Rashid-ad-Din, 1952. p. 127). Many Christians were also among the Naimans. The information on the existence of the Nestorians in Central Asia gave birth to a legend about Presbyter John, which was widely popular in medieval literature. The first records of this legend are found in chronicles of the 12th century (1145). Having existed for more than a century, this legend

supported the intention of Rome to convert the nomads of faraway Asia to Christianity (Pian del Carpine and Rubrouck 1957, p. 7). The story of two Uighur Nestorians from the region of Beijing, who went on a pilgrimage to worship at the shrines in Jerusalem which lasted for a lifetime, was one of the examples of contact between East and West. Mar Yahballaha III became the Nestorian catholicos with Rabban Bar Sauma as his assistant. Rabban Sauma was an ambassador of Arghun Khan to Europe, vising Pope Honorius IV among other Christian European rulers. When Rabban Sauma arrived in Rome from Beijing at the end of the 13th century, he told the Roman cardinals: "Know this, fathers, that many of our fathers went to the lands of the Mongols, Turks, and Chinese and preached. Now many Mongols are Christians" (Pigulevskaya 1958, 13; Kychanov 1978, p. 83). Chagatai (1185–1242) – the Mongol ruler and the second son of Genghis Khan and Borte – was known as a friend of Christians, probably because of his hostility towards Islam. According to a story told by Marco Polo, he was baptized, but this was not confirmed by any other sources (Bartold 1964, p. 540).

In southern Kazakhstan, there are three major historical and cultural regions that developed urban life: South Kazakhstan (or the Peri-Syr-Darya) geographical province, Southwestern Semirechye (Chuy and Talas valleys), and Northeastern Semirechye (Ili River valley). The existence of Christians was confirmed by archaeological evidence discovered at these locations belonging to different time periods.

South-Western Semirechye. Talas valley (6th–10th centuries)

One of the oldest cities of Semirechye is the city of Taraz, located on the Talas River. It was first mentioned in Byzantine sources dating back to the end of the 6th century. The city was one of the major centers on the Great Silk Road. Almost all medieval geographers, historians, and travelers wrote about Taraz (Talas) noting, foremost, its trade significance. Taraz reached its height of prosperity during the 11th and 12th centuries under the Kara-Khanids, who conquered the region and put an end to the Samanid dynasty. In 1220 the city was destroyed by the Mongols, as evidenced by remnants of fire found during excavations. Apparently, it was renamed *Yany* ("New") by the Mongols.

In 1938 religious objects, dating to the 6th and 8th centuries, were found within the ancient city of Taraz during archaeological excavations at its northeastern section, in the so-called V layer, at a depth of about 4.5 m. Among the finds was a small earthen vessel with a loop-shaped handle with traces of yellowish-red glaze, and a three-line Syriac inscription which had been boldly inscribed before the vessel was baked. The pot was made of local clay, presumably on the same spot as it was found (Bernshtam 1941, pp. 21–22). Based on the manner of writing typical of the Western Jacobite style of Syriac script, A. Y. Borisov attributed the inscription to Jacobite Christians. The text contains two Christian names: Peter and Gabriel (Borisov 1948, p. 108). A. B. Nikitin noted that the identity of the community responsible for the inscription, as well as the presence of the Jacobites in Central Asia

in such an early period, remains an open question. In the first half of the 7th century, there were Jacobite metropolitans established at Sistan and Herat, but on the whole, in comparison with Nestorians the missionary activity of Jacobites in the East was minor. The numerous Jacobite churches in Eastern Turkestan of which Marco Polo wrote about, arose much later in the region, no earlier than the 11th century. Based on Qazwini's report, V. V. Bartold supposed that the Jacobite Christians were among the Oghuz who wandered in the Caspian steppes (Nikitin 1984, pp. 125–126; Bartold 1964, p. 285; Yagodin and Khodzhayov 1970, p. 146; Tolstov 1946).

The Syriac vessel from Taraz was excavated from a layer consisting of dense clay-loess and, in several places, this layer was disturbed by pits through which objects of a later date was deposited. No architecture was found in the layer of loess, although some remains – pieces of raw material, plaster, and other construction debris – were found in the southern part of the excavation. According to A. N. Bernshtam, the low amount of cultural remains also indicates that the excavation was in an unbuilt area, but adjacent to a building (Bernshtam 1941, pp. 21–22).

There were Christian burials discovered in the necropolis of Tik-Turmas, where the dead were placed in wooden coffins or boxes fastened with iron-forged nails or buried in pits covered with wooden boards laid across the grave. Besides single graves, there was also one double grave, most likely it is a burial of a mother with a child (grave No. 15). The burials were oriented with the head to the west and hands folded on the chest. Anthropological types are mixed (Caucasoid and Mongoloid). The accompanying inventory is missing, but among the finds there was a round bronze plate and the remains of silk material (Senigova 1968, pp. 66–67).

Fig. 1. Cross Pendant. 8th century Kostobe Necropolis. Bronze

The presence of Christians in the South-Western Semirechye region is confirmed by the discovery of a bronze cross pendant at the necropolis of Kostobe from the 7th–9th centuries (Fig. 1), which is identified with the city of Jamukat. The necropolis is located 500 m north of the citadel, outside of the rabad (periurban area). At the top of the cross there is a ring-shaped loop so that it could be suspended. The cross is divided into three parts by horizontal concentric lines and the

lower vertical arm of the cross is elongated. At the intersection of the cross there is an X-shaped mark. A 19th – century nacreous – colored cross from Jerusalem, assumed to be a Melkite artifact, also has a carved X in the middle of the cross and has rounded elements at its ends (Piotrovsky 1998, fig. 122). Balls and teardrop-shapes at both ends of the cross symbolize drops of the blood of Christ, shed for the atonement of man's sins. The X-shaped (oblique cross), later named "St. Andrew's Cross", is the initial letter of the Christ's name in the simplest graphic style. This symbol was the basis for subsequent, but more complex monograms. The name of Christ, located at the intersection, points to the two natures of the Savior: the divine (vertical) and the human (horizontal).

Burials containing cleaned bones stored in *khums* (ceramic vessels with holes at the bottom), along with burials in *naus* (ossuaries), were found in the necropolis of Kostobe. Five khums were in the northern part of the necropolis, in the passage formed between two rows of nauses. The khums, 0.5 to 1 m in height, were covered with flat stone plates on top. On the side of one of the khums, there is a mark drawn in the form of the letter "X". Parts of skeletons were found in the burial vessels – such as the skull and the long bones. In some khums, along with the bones, were found personal adornments of the dead – earrings and rings (Baipakov 2012, p. 302).

The image of the cross was also found on a Taraz khum containing cleaned human bones from the 9th–10th centuries. It was found in 1939 on the territory of the Central Park of Culture and Recreation (Rempel 1957, p. 110). T. N. Senigova cites a stamped ornament, located in two rows, in the form of a looped ring, with an equilateral broad-arm cross inscribed in a single pattern on the khums (Senigova 1968, p. 59). Images of crosses are known on Sogdian *astodans* (vaults for bones) (Pugachenkova 1950, p. 44). A. Borisov suggested that the rite of burying washed and cleaned bones in astodans and khums might have existed in communities beyond the Sogdian and Zoroastrian populations of Central Asia (Borisov 1940, pp. 25–50).

V. N. Yagodin suggested that the appearance of Christian symbols on alabaster ossuaries of the 7th and 8th centuries, found in the Khorezm necropolis of ancient Mizdakhkan, can be attributed to the influence of Nestorianism that spread from Byzantium along the roads of the Caucasus (Yagodin and Khodjaiyov 1970, p. 147; Yagodin 2008, p. 138). According to researchers, the hypothesis about Christian affiliation of the burial structure IV, uncovered at the Mizdakhkan necropolis, draws attention to the issue of synchronous burials of previously cleaned bones in ground pits without using ossuaries or other burial vessels (Yagodin and Khodjaiyov 1970, p. 150).

One method of burial in the Kostobe necropolis is represented by small groups of bones in pits. Several such heaps were found throughout the necropolis (Baipakov 2012, p. 302). At the city necropolis of Taraz, the simplest burial of bones was a hole dug in gravel with a diameter of 0.6–0.8 m; the bones were arranged in a heap and covered with pebbles. In some cases, the pits were covered with stone slabs.

The "small vaults" made of mud brick were found in 1927 on the territory of the ancient necropolis of Taraz, which M.E. Masson called the "slotted graves of the Nestorians" (Figs. 2, 3-4). The Nestorian cemetery, in his opinion, "crept" to this area from the older Zoroastrian necropolis. The "small vaults" are structures of mud bricks laid flatwise, on top of them there were bricks set on edge connected at the top. According to some ethnographic studies, there was a custom in Khorezm to construct miniature "houses" from two to three bricks that imitated the *Arvoh Uyi* ("Spirit House"). Near some of the mazars (mausolea), such "houses" occupied a significant area of land (Snesarev 1969, p. 111).

In the Karluk period (9th–10th centuries), the custom of burying bones in astodans at Taraz changed to burials in khums and little vaults. Such funeral rites existed in Taraz among the local urban population, including the Turkic-speakers, as well as among some of the adherents of the Nestorian Christian sect. The sect continued to exist in the cities of the Talas and Chuy Valleys for much longer than in Transoxiana and ceased to be a special feature of the Sogdian population (Rempel 1957, pp. 109–110, Figs. 42, 1, 3, 4).

Problems associated with the study of Christian monuments include the tendency to identify them by the presence of crosses. Different scholars attribute the same symbol

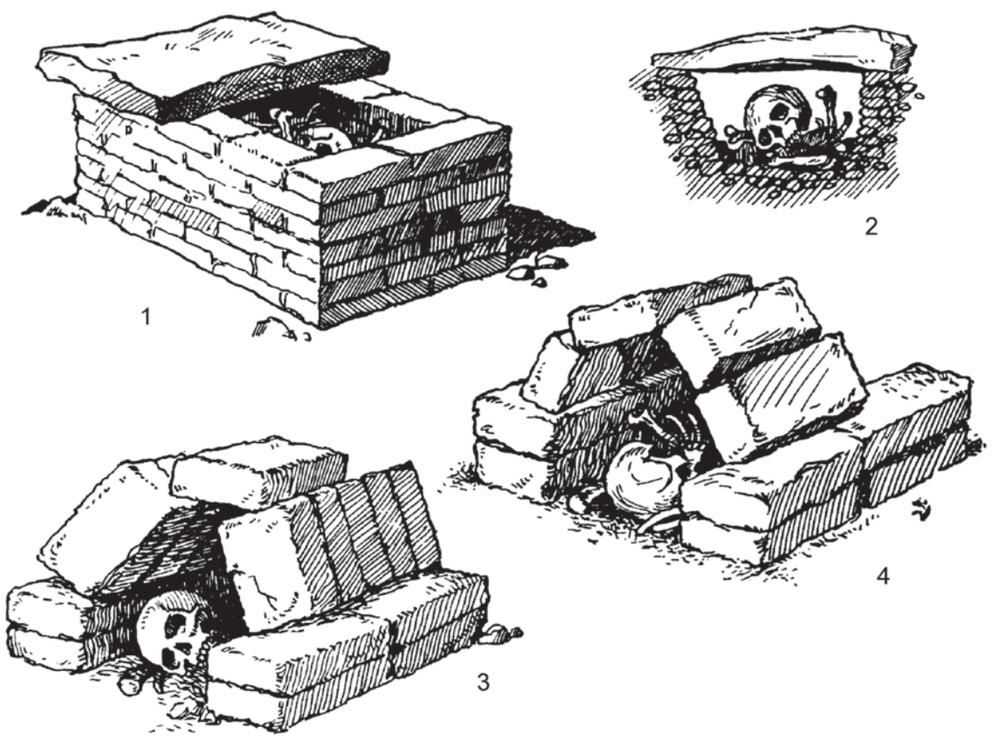

Fig. 2. Types of burials (Rempel, 1957): 1 – chamber built from fired bricks;2 – pit under a stone slab; 3, 4 – small vaults made from mudbricks. Taraz city necropolis

to either Christianity or Manichaeism. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact of the presence of such symbols. According to T. N. Senigova, a stamp of an equal-arm cross with flared ends was intended for imprinting clay objects, and it was found in Lower Barskhan, indicated Christianity (Senigova 1968, Figs. 1–6). There is a flared cross of a similar shape on decorating a fragment of the handle of a clay vessel of the 9th–10th centuries found in Taraz (Fig. 3) (Baipakov 1994, Fig. 27).

Fig. 3. Fragment of the handle of a clay vessel. 9th–10th centuries. Kayalyk

A pit burial was discovered containing cleaned bones at the site of Ak-Beshim (Suyab), Kyrgyzstan; it was accompanied by a vessel with an equal-arm cross with flared ends inscribed on the surface. In a monograph by V. N. Yagodin and T. K. Khodjayov this burial is referred to as "indisputably Christian". L. R. Kyzlasov identified the styles of the crosses as Manichean. He suggested that the two cemeteries (objects III and V) discovered in 1953 in the sacred ground that surrounded Ak-Beshim, and judging by the arrangement and funeral rites, appear to be Manichaean. The mudbrick platforms ("towers of silence"), according to L. R. Kyzlasova, arose under the influence of Zoroastrianism and were intended to separate the flesh from the bones. Then the bones were placed in khum burial vessels or in terracotta ossuaries. From the point of view of the researchers, the Manichaean burial cult is associated with earthen or mudbrick vaults built on the surface of the earth. A vessel (object III) with a tubular spout and a looped handle was discovered next to a pile of cleaned human bones in the so-called "Manichaean cemetery", within a narrow "trench" when the mudbrick platform was built. On the side of the vessel was an equal-arm cross with flared ends. A similar cross, but incomplete in the lower half, was discovered on another khums. All the fired bricks, having a round shape, at the site V, which once embellished the top of the tower, were decorated with imprinted representation of equal-sided Manichaean crosses with flared ends in the middle. A burial vault was discovered during excavations at the surface level, below the "tower of silence" – and it was determined by L. R. Kyzlasov as Manichean (Kyzlasov 2006, pp. 139–141, Fig. 2).

Terracotta Object from Taraz

Found in Taraz, a fragment of a terracotta tile (5th–6th centuries) exhibits an image of a cross (Fig. 4), measuring 20×10×1.3 cm. The cross, judging by the extant fragment, has equal-arms and flared, with round elements at the corners and the ends. There are stems with leaves that branch off from the base of the cross in both directions – it is a pattern characteristic of blooming crosses. To the right of the cross, surrounded by a beaded frame,

Fig. 4. Fragment of a terracotta tile from the 5th–6th centuries. Taraz

there are three figures, wearing belted robes with hands folded on their chests in prayer. Above them there is a strip of beads and, above that, there is another row of figures, of which only two pairs of feet and the hems of their robes survive. To the right of the figures lies a vertical strip of floral ornaments, and to the left of the left figure there are two words handwritten in a script close to Syriac (Lurie 2013, p. 227). T. N. Senigova suggests that the image is Christian (Senigova 1968, pp. 62–64). G. L. Semenov, who published a good photograph of the relief, reported that fragments of the inscription were made partly in Sogdian and partly in Manichaean letters, and were preserved on the reverse side of the plaque (Semyonov 1996, pp. 65–66, Fig. 21). However, Yutaka Yosida – a Japanese researcher from Kyoto who saw the unpublished reverse side of the plaque, stated that the text is Syriac and not Manichaean, according to P. B. Lurie (Lurie 2013, pp. 226–227, 248, 249).

Individual terracotta plaques (tiles) belonging to the Christian religion are noted among the miscellaneous finds at the Krasnorechensk and Gyaur-Kala sites. A tile with a molded stucco image is stored in the Louvre. On all the tiles, there is a single type of cross with an elongated lower arm and flaring ends, and two teardrop shapes at the corners of the arm (Kolchenko 2003, p. 60; Semyonov, Tashbayeva, Malkiel, and Vedutova 1998, pp. 29–31; Masson 1978, p. 51; Litvinsky 1996, p. 423). On the excavation site of a Christian complex (Area VIII) of the 10th – early 11th century, that was discovered in the southeastern corner of the shahristan of the ancient settlement of Ak-Beshim, there were found fragments of two terracotta plaques with the sign of the cross with elongated lower arms and flaring ends,

framed by a number of other elements. In 2000 there was also found a complete plaque with a slightly different design, but with the same symbol of the cross. Most of the rooms in the Christian complex at Ak-Beshim were once decorated with paintings. The remnants of a cover and a few handwritten pages of a book were found on the floor of one of the rooms. There was a Sogdian commemorative inscription decorating the rim of a khum, and on the back of a clay plaque with a cross there is a Turkic inscription in Syriac script. Several fragments of Uygur or Sogdian inscriptions were uncovered on the plaster along with paintings. The relationship between the plan of the site and the finds show that the building was a complex of Christian churches. However, there is no consensus about the Nestorian identification of the monument (Semenov 1999a; Semenov 2002b; Kolchenko 2002, pp. 164–165).

The type of crosses like those that are on the tile from Taraz do not always belong to Nestorians. Christian cross pendants with flared ends, decorated with beads, were found on the sites of Afrasiyab and Krasnaya Rechka (Terenozhkin 1950, Fig. 72–2; Baipakov,

Fig. 5. "Palm Sunday" Scene. A wall-painting from a Nestorian sanctuary of the 8th–9th centuries. Qocho (Turfan)

Ternovaya, and Goryacheva 2007, Fig. 308–1). Similar crosses are depicted on the monuments of Byzantine Kherson dating back to the 12th – 13th centuries (Chichurov 1991, Figs. 149, 213–216, 221). A similar cross was present on a fragment of a Manichaean silk flag, drawn by A. Lecoq in Turfan, though it no longer survives (Lurie 2013, p. 248).

The orant figures and poses on the tile from Taraz, the belted gowns, as well as arms folded on the chest, correspond to a Palm Sunday scene painted within a Nestorian sanctuary located at the western gate of Qocho city (Turfan) from the 8th – 9th centuries (Fig. 5). On a fragment obtained by Lecoq's expedition, the deacon has a censer and a chalice in his hands while the parishioners reach toward him with long branches. In the upper part of the fragment there are hooves of horses, which was located above the main composition – most likely this is an image of St. George on horseback. From this sanctuary, there was also an image of a praying round-faced monk in long-skirted clothes with arms folded on his chest (Fig. 6). There are some similarities with the mural from Bezeklik (8th – 9th centuries) near Turfan, where three Uighur princes are depicted (Fig. 7) (*Vostochnyi* ... 1992, pp. 144, 539, Fig. 4; Underova 1994, p. 102, Fig. 29).

Fig. 6. Image of a monk. Wall-painting in a Nestorian temple from the 8th–9th centuries Qocho (Turfan)

Fig. 7. Uighur Princes. Painting from Bezeklik near Turfan, 8th–9th centuries

Two-tiered compositions can be seen on a fresco from sanctuary No. 6 in Bezeklik showing Uighur donators, as well as on the page of a Manichaean manuscript from the 8th–9th centuries from Gaochang (Qocho-Turfan) with an image of the "elect" writing at their desks (*Vostochnyi* ... 1992, C. 358, 40, Fig. 15, 17). The tiered system of arranging the figures was used by medieval artists in Central Asia, for example, in the paintings of the Red Hall of Varakhsha, some rooms at Panjakent, and paintings at the palace of Afrasiyab from the 7th century (Albaum 1975, p. 100). The terracotta tile with images and inscriptions on the back side indicate the presence of Christian preachers in Taraz in the 5th–6th centuries.

Chuy Valley (7th–12th centuries)

East of the city of Taraz there is the Lugovoye ancient settlement which has been identified as the medieval city of Kulan. In the travel guide of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (7th century), and in the *History of the Tang dynasty*, it is named Tsui Lan. Kulan was mentioned by Arab authors: Ibn Khordadbeh (9th century), Qudamah and al-Maqdisi (10th century), Ibn al-Asir and Yaqut (12th–13th centuries) (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986, pp. 65, 180–181; Barthold 1963a, p. 230; Volin 1960, pp. 74, 76, 82, 83). The site of "Lugovoe G" represents a mound (*tobe*) located two km south-east of the central ruins of the citadel and shahristan of the Lugovoye ancient settlement, within the territory surrounded by a long wall. The excavations revealed existence of constructions from three different periods: the original building of the 7th–8th centuries, the building of the second phase of the 9th–10th centuries, and the upper construction phase of the 10th–12th centuries (Baipakov 1998, p. 121–128).

Table-Dastarkhans from "Lugovoe G"

A collection of ceramic dastarkhan tables, found during the excavations of "Lugovoe G", amounts to about 15 examples (Nurzhanov and Ternovaya 2014). Intact tables and fragments were found in all construction phases (Fig. 8, 9). They have a round tabletop 50–60 cm in diameter, with thickness of 2.5–3 cm which rest against the stand in the form of an inverted bowl 5–8 cm high. The decoration was applied before firing in the kiln, it was made with finger imprints and stripes, incised lines, together with small impressions (oval, semi-oval or triangular) and patterns. The sides of the tabletops were decorated with slanting straight or curved lines with stamped or indented circles.

The three dastarkhan tables that date to the construction phases of the 7th–9th centuries have intact bowl-shaped stands and, in two cases, adjoining fragments of tabletops. An ornamental motif of a cross was drawn with a finger, depicted on the inside of the stands where the tables are connected together. Two of the tables belong to the early phase of the Turkic-Sogdian period. The tabletop of one of the dastarkhans is three cm thick, its stand is six cm high and measures 31 cm in diameter (Fig. 8.2). The lower part is covered with a light ocher-color engobe and the top is red-brick in color. Judging by its broken fragments, the tabletop was decorated with a pattern consisting of incised curved lines and circular finger impressions. The supporting part of the stand is decorated with carved slanted lines. Inside the stand there is a cross made by two intersecting lines. The top of each arm of the cross is marked with a round finger imprint. In the sections between the of the cross arms, there are round impressions alternating with either two or three in each quadrant.

The height of the second table is 13 cm (Fig. 8.3). The diameter of the stand at the bottom is 28 cm, the height is eight cm. The lower part of the table is covered with a light ocher engobe. The fragmentary tabletop is decorated with straight lines made by incision and round finger impressions. The ornamental motif is divided into sectors with stamp rollers forming

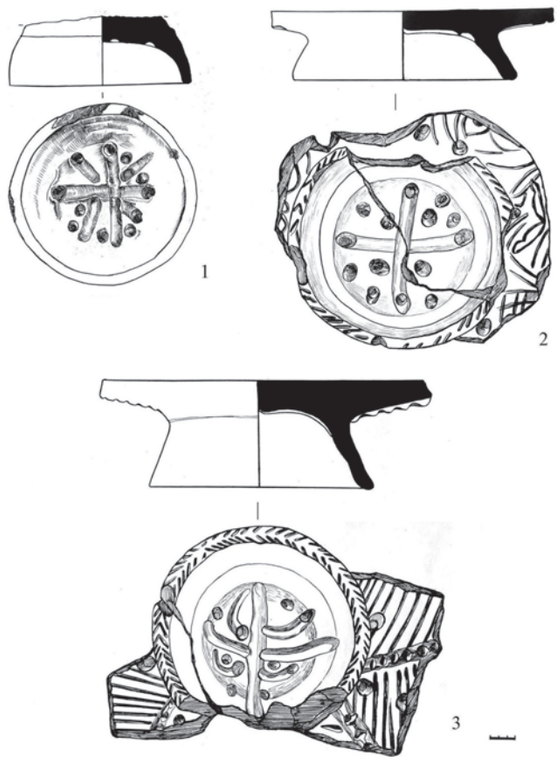

Fig. 8. Fragments of ceramic tables from the 7th–9th centuries. Lugovoye G (source: Nurzhanov, Ternovaya 2014)

impressions. The supporting part of the stand is decorated with carved oblique lines forming a kind of "Christmas wreath" pattern. In the center of the stand, there is a tree or cross depicted by dragging the finger across the wet clay. The cross' arms stretch upwards. Similar stretching arms are depicted below and above the crossbar. On the arms, and between them, are round impressions made by the tips of fingers. In comparison, there is a deep relief of a cross or stylized tree made on raw clay at the small Christian monastery in the northeast corner of Gyaur-kala (ancient Merv); the cross was located on the southern wall in one of the rooms of the southeastern group of ruins, which were in the form of oval houses (Usmanova 1994, p. 27).

Only the stand remained from the third table, found in the upper construction layer (Fig. 8.1). Judging by the extant fragment, its total height was 10.5 cm, while the height of the stand was six cm, and the wall thickness of the supporting part of the stand was 1.5 cm. The lower part of the table is covered by a light brick-color engobe. The cross is also drawn with finger with two overlapping lines. In the sections between the cross arms, there are lines drawn in such a way that they form an unconnected "X" sign in the center. The round finger imprints are found between the straight lines and at their ends.

A similar design of table is found in a collection from the 8th–10th centuries, gathered in the territory of the early medieval settlements of the north of the Tian-Shan range. There, in the circle of a bowl-shaped stand, there is an image of a cross with oval holes drawn with the finger – one in each sector (Mokrynin and Ploskikh 1969).

One more table from" Lugovoe G" is represented by two fragments. The thickness of the tabletop is approximately 2.5 cm. The underside is covered with baked milk-color engobe, the upper side is of brick color. The carved ornament is combined with round depressions formed by finger impressions. The small rim of the tabletop has a width of 2.5 cm and is decorated by two rows of ornamentation in the form of a repeating arch with a notch-point

in the center. Presumably, this ornament imitates bird plumage. The space between the rim and the fragment of the stand is filled with decorative images of exotic birds with crests (peacocks?), whose wings and tails are depicted as vegetal elements – petals and flowers. The feathered birds have long necks and hooked beaks. The two birds touch each other with outstretched wings. Their heads are located closer to the center and are turned to the left, while their bodies are shown frontally. The design creates an illusion that the birds are circling in the sky. The surface of the tabletop inside the stand is decorated with carved floral ornament and finger imprints. Perhaps peacocks and cruciform figures depicted in the decoration of tables belong to Christian symbolism.

Fig. 9. Fragments of a ceramic table from the 9th–10th centuries. Lugovoye G (source: Nurzhanov, Ternovaya 2014)

Images of birds with a similar turn of the head, a hook-shaped beak, spread wings and wave-like plumage are found on Samarkand ceramics – on a jug and a bottom of a dish from the end of the 9th–10th centuries (Shishkina 1979, Table L). The transformation of a bird into a floral form is noted on glazed pottery of Samarkand of the 10th–12th centuries (Pugachenkova and Rempel 1965, p. 215, Fig. 47). The carved floral ornament in the center of the table is similar to the patterns that decorate the vessels with anthropomorphic features found in the Talas valley, in which the images of Avestan deities are embodied. The style of these vessels belongs to the 8th–9th centuries. In the archaeological layers of ancient settlements of the Talas valley, they appear in phases no later than the 12th century (Baipakov and Ternovaya 2005, pp. 78–88). The images of peacocks, pigeons, and birds with crests are found on dastarkhans of the 10th–12th centuries excavated in Otrar (Baipakov and Erzakovich 1991, p. 22). The dastarkhans are among artifacts that are frequently found in the early medieval and medieval ancient settlements of Central Asia, Southern Kazakhstan, and Semirechye.

Functional Purpose of the Dastarkhan

Dastarkhan tables have greatly interested researchers. Their studies included consideration of forms, techniques of manufacturing, and decoration. Some researchers believe that the purpose of decoration was embellishment. From their point of view, the function of the dastarkhans was twofold: first, utilitarian as a table, and, second, decoration

of the home's interior, therefore their reverse side is artistically rendered (Kozhemyako 1959, pp. 41–42; Sinenkaya 1976). There was an assumption that there existed a relationship between dastarkhans with sacrificial tables of an earlier time, including the bronze sacrificial tables of Saka found in Semirechye. According to experts, tables on three legs have their origin in the tables of the Sarmatian period. The discovery of these tables in the second construction phase of Taraz (3rd–4th centuries) allow us to speak of genetic kinship with the previous culture (Senigova, 1972. P. 96, 97). In the burials of the Kenkol tombs (2nd–4th centuries), there were two types of wooden tables found among the accompanying objects. According to A. N. Bernstam the tables that served for making food with flour were constructed from one piece of wood. Another type of tables survives, but in fragments. The tabletop has a barely noticeable rim; on the reverse side there are bulges with grooves where leg spikes were inserted. Traces of brown paint remains on the tables (Bernstam 1940, pp. 18–19).

In dastarkhan ornamentation of the 8th–10th centuries, as found in the Chuy valley, there was symbolism conveying their ritual use, since "their bearers were tribal people with ideological images of the Avesta cycle and, in general, Indo-Iranian culture" (Vedutova 1996). There is also a theory regarding the link of ceramic tables with thrones (Ternovaya 2000; Baipakov and Ternovaya, 2005, p. 158).

The use of ritual tables is noted in different cultures. They are considered as thrones (that is, earthly thrones of deities). The symbols of deities were placed on the thrones, which indicates the worshippers' participation in ritual and, possibly, sacrifices intended for the deities. On a silver jug of the 5th–7th centuries from Sludka (Russia), there is a female figure with a nimbus and royal ribbons reproduced in a medallion, her bare legs rest on an ornamented pediment – a throne, under which there are two peacocks. In one of the woman's hand there is a bird, in the other hand, she holds a naked child. To the left of the central figure there is another naked child with a sheep on their shoulders (i.e. *kriophoros*), under the base of the columns there are figures of naked children turning to the right and left. V. G. Lukonin suggested that the female image on the jug may be the embodiment of the syncretic image of Anahita–Virgin Mary (Lukonin 1987, p. 25). On a bowl from Bartym, there are images of two peacocks with ribbons on their necks; fantastic images of birds reflect ideas about the three spheres of the universe. The altar, located between the peacocks, is shown in the form of a low table with a pedestal and a flat tabletop. According to researchers, the findspot of the dishes is associated with a sanctuary that existed in the Ural region until the 7th–8th centuries (Bader and Smirnov 1954). Among Christians, the peacock is presented as a symbol of immortality and the incorruptible soul. In Western European art, the bird was represented as drinking from the Eucharistic cup, pecking at the fruits of the grapevine. Common motifs include images of a peacock near the paradisiacal Tree of Life, as well as two peacocks by the World Tree. Peacocks are sometimes depicted in Nativity scenes and also drinking from a goblet.

According to Christian beliefs, the church throne also characterizes a heavenly throne – the throne of God – on which "the Lord Almighty himself is present in a mysterious way". In the folk tradition of the Eastern Slavs, regarding the symbolic understanding of the altar, the key factor was its similarity to the church throne ("the table is the throne" or "the table is the throne of God"). The church throne itself has historically been a table, an altar, on which a sacrifice is performed, which in Christianity has taken the form of the Eucharist celebration. It was not allowed to place extrinsic objects on the table, since this is the place of God himself; it was forbidden to knock on the table, for it symbolized the palm of God or the Mother of God (Baiburin and Toporkov 1990).

The cross-shaped figures located in the center of the table from "Lugovoye G" are comparable with the symbology of the World Tree or the "hub of the universe". Images of crosses are found from the beginning of the history of mankind. Originally it was a pagan symbol. It is generally believed that the figure of the cross metaphorically reproduced the sacramental intersection where life and death meet. Perhaps it this is one reason why in the era of the emergence of world religions on earth, people again turned to this ancient symbol. As the main sacral symbol, the image of the cross was used by all denominations of Christian doctrine.

Several studies trace the correspondence between the ordinary and the sacrificial meal. In its original form, sacrifice is the feeding of supernatural powers. The meal appears as an exchange with God. In gratitude for the granted food, the partakers pray (Toporkov 1991, p. 198). V. N. Toporov noted the etymological connection between the Slavic words *žratvá* (жратва, similar to English chow or grub) and žértva (жертва, sacrificial victim) (Toporov 1989, p. 23). The table is regarded as the sacred center of the house. A portable table, like a hearth, could serve as a place of sacrifice and enjoyed special honor. Most cultures have a respectful religious attitude to food. The collective meal with the dismemberment of the animal carcass are rooted in ancient rituals. In the mythological tradition, a sacrificed person or animal embodies the cosmos and serves as the material for its creation (Baiburin and Toporkov 1990; Sagalayev and Oktyabrskaya 1990, p. 43).

The Christian rite of the Eucharist or Holy Communion consists in the consecration of bread and wine and subsequent eating. In early Christian communities, communion with bread and wine did not gain widespread acceptance immediately. Christians continued to offer sacrificial animals or participated in the sacrificial meals of devotees of other religions. Therefore, the apostle Paul explained that the sacrament had a mystical, ritual content, and not just a shared dinner of believers (1 Corinthians 10.21; 11.20–21.34).

Even though tables, and more often their fragments, were found in different construction layers, a greater number of finds belong to the Karakhanid period – 10th–11th centuries. In this period, there is a type of building with a courtyard, but no lobby or façade, which suggests its possible purpose – a private guesthouse complex (Ternovaya 2013).

The winery on the ancient settlement of Aktobe Stepninskoye

Winemaking culture spread by virtue of the Sogdians. Judging by the inscriptions on the khums of Semirechye (Zhetysu), they were the main producers of grapes and used wine in their religious rites. The fact that Christians were engaged in the production of wine is evidenced by Sogdian inscriptions on ceramics, on the rims of large khums used for wine, found on the ancient settlements of Krasnorechensk and Pokrovka in Kyrgyzstan (Livshits 1981, pp. 81–83; Baipakov 1994, pp. 99–100). In the district of the city of Kulan, archaeologists surveyed "Lugovoe B" hill, which hid the remains of a rural estate: here in one of the premises there was a workshop for the processing of grapes – this facility produced wine, and grape juice was boiled for thickening (*pekmez* or *shinni*). The complex for squeezing grape juice of the 10th–12th centuries was uncovered two kilometers south of the main ruins. Two more wineries similar in date and construction were revealed nearby, on the ancient settlement of Aktobe Stepninskoye (Fig. 10) (Eleuov 1980, p. 57–61; Baipakov 1998, p. 135–138; Akymbek and Nurzhanov, 2009). Grape seeds were found in the shahristan dwellings of the city of Taraz, in its suburban estates – at Chigil and Chul-tepe. The winemaking workshop was also analyzed at the sites of Tortkol and Nizhny Barskhan in the Talas Valley (Senigova 1972, pp. 68, 108).

Wine production by Christians was confirmed during the study of one of the wineries of the 10th–11th centuries in the ancient settlement of Aktobe Stepninskoye, which is

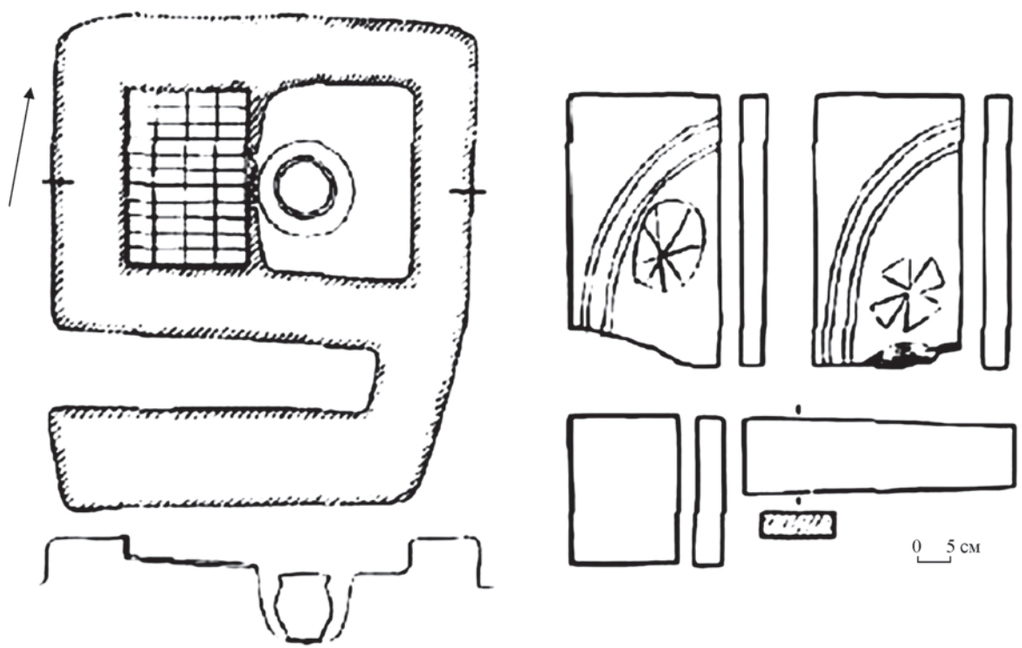

Fig. 10. Plan of a 10th–11th century winery and images of bricks with cross marks. Aktobe Stepninskoye

located in the middle reaches of the Chu River. Two kilometers south of the central ruins there is a group of estates that form a "rectangle". The largest of them, the central one in the group, is an oval mound with a diameter of 35 m, surrounded by smaller mounds. The long side of the rectangle is 80 m, the short side is 40 m. On the western side of the complex, there is a dry channel of the main canal with a branch going inside the "rectangle". In the northwestern part of the shared courtyard there is a mound, flat on top with a diameter of 10 m and a height of about one meter. Excavations revealed an oval-shaped structure which was identified as a complex for pressing grape juice. The building was a small one-room house, built of mud bricks (30×18×8 cm). The type of masonry construction was preserved – with stretchers and headers (of which survived three rows). The dimensions of the building were 5.6×6.2 m, its long axis was oriented along a north-south axis.

The room consisted of two parts: a pressing area and a closet separated from it by a wall with a khum, embedded within the floor to the level of the rim. The site is rectangular (2.8×1.5 m). The floor is laid out with fired rectangular bricks (34.5–35×18–19×3.5–4 cm). On the surface of the bricks there are signs in the form of two parallel lines drawn by the fingers connecting the corners diagonally, and in the form of crosses scratched on them before firing, in one case – a circle with three intersecting lines were inside. A total of 44 bricks were used in its construction. The same type of bricks, placed as headers, surrounded the walls of the pressing pad. The seams between the bricks were filled with alabaster mortar. The floor of the site is inclined towards the khum, which is dug into the floor of the room, separated by a wall. It has an opening for the gutter that connects the platform and khum. The gutter was made of bricks cut in half lengthwise: one was placed at the bottom, flanked by the two other bricks, forming channels, bound with alabaster mortar. The khum has a round shape with steep shoulders; the rim is bent outwards; the height of the khum is 80 cm, the diameter of the rim is 55 cm, and the capacity was about 180 liters.

The entrance to the premise was on the southern side. Since the pressing site and the khum were separated by an external wall, which is fixed in the layout, it seems that there was a narrow corridor, which in fact could serve as the "free space" of the workshop, from where grapes were gathered and prepared at the site. During the excavation of the workshop, there was discovered a ceramic assemblage, which was dated according to a fragment of a glazed bowl. Transparent glost was laid on a white engobe, and the slip was made in the form of yellow and green spots. Such ceramics are characteristic of the 10th–12th centuries. Apart from the fragment of the bowl, there was a curved handle with flutes from a water pitcher, and fragments of two flat-bottomed boilers with straight rims and crescent-shaped handles, as well as a loop-shaped handle from another boiler.

Information about the spread of viticulture and winemaking in Semirechye is provided by Xiu Anzang (602–664). He describes a feast at the encampment of the Turkic Khagan where wine and grape juice are among the victuals. Traveling through the Talas Valley in the 13th century, Guillaume de Rubrouck, the Flemish Franciscan monk, saw grapevines there

Fig. 11. Jade pendant depicting a cross. 8th–9th centuries. Aktobe Stepninskoye. (Discovered by F. P. Grigoryev)

and drank wine twice. The cultivation of grapes in the regions of Central Asia is almost two thousand years old (Pian del Carpine and Rubrouck 1957, pp. 125, 231).

F. P. Grigoryev, during the archaeological survey of the ancient settlement of Aktobe Stepninskoye, discovered a pendant of translucent light gray jade with an image of cross (Fig. 11). The artifact has an approximate rectangular shape (3.5×3.1×0.5 cm) and, unfortunately, the flange at the top was broken off. The cross is thick and has equal-length arms; the rectangular arms are subdivided into smaller squares by lines. In the middle of the cross there is a hole with a diameter of 0.5-0.6 cm, within it was inserted a cylindrical green mineral. The article was found in a hole exposed by soil erosion of the riverbank, among fragments of pottery of the 8th–10th centuries (Grigoryev, Zheleznyakov, htm). The pectoral cross (8th–9th centuries) with expanding "branches" of the same size was found on the territory of the shahristan of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement. It is carved from a solid piece of white jade. From the upper "branch" of the cross there is a flange with a hole for suspending it. In the center of the cross there is a circle, along the edges there are small notches. Triangular notches in the center of the "branches" of the cross give them a shape that resembles a fish tail (*Monuments* ...1983, p. 67–68, fig. 261a). A jade cross was also found on the site of Ak-Beshim (Semenov 2002).

Jade products were probably imported from China. The "Jade Route" connected Eastern Turkestan with China. Based on the place of extraction, it was often called Khotan or Kunlun jade. The ritual use of royal jade is related to Chinese culture. Bi Yuan proposed that the mythical Jade Mountain (Yuishan) was located in Gansu province, 70 li from the city of Ganzhou, where there was a temple of Sivanmu (Si-wan-mu) (*Catalogue* 1977, 44, 151; Shefer 1981, pp. 295–296; Komissarov 1999, p. 7).

Southern Kazakhstan (11th–12th centuries)

The caravan route connected Semirechye with the city of Sharab, located near the city of Ispidjab. Christians in the medieval cities of Southern Kazakhstan were mentioned in a written source of the 14th–19th centuries, and therein contained a story about Iskhak Baba. It narrated that "during the time of the caliphate of Murtada 'Ali ... Kusam ibn 'Abbas (and) Muhammad 'Abd al-Jalil, leading thirty thousand followers of the Companions

[of the Prophet]...went to the countries of Uzgand in Fargana, Chach (and) Isbidjab; apparently, they fought with magicians and Christians ..." (*Islamization* ... 2013, p. 146). The main population of Sairam, as stated in the source, was completely Christian. When Iskhak Bab arrived in Sairam: "there was one sovereign; his name was Bait ad-Dar. The people (el) of Sairam constituted 260,000 homesteads; (and) they (had) 330 market squares; they were all Christians. Iskhak Bab called upon Bait ad-Dara to [convert to the] faith; he did not yield. He said: "Since the time of my seventieth ancestor, I remain a Christian; my religion is also true". Bait ad-Dar besieged the city for three days; 20,000 Christians died, (and) five thousand Muslims died as martyrs. Among those followers of the successors ... one was called 'Abd al-'Aziz, and he was the standard-bearer of ... Iskhak Bab. He was hit by arrows in seventy places; he died as a martyr in Sairam" (*Islamization* ... 2013, pp. 157–159, 236). A ceramic jar of the 7th–9th centuries with images of equal-arm crosses made by stamping was discovered on the territory of the ancient settlement of Kuiryktobe located in the Otrar oasis (photo 4).

As stated above, the practice of studying Christian monuments based on archaeological materials, there is a tendency to identify them according to the presence of a cross, and crosses of various shapes are often considered "Nestorian". At the same time, there is not enough attention paid to the study of the attributes and characteristics of the ritual practice of Christians of different denominations.

Stone vessels from the Southern Kazakhstan

(Ternovaya 2016). The stone vessels are dated to the Karakhanid period – 10th–12th centuries. One of them, pertaining to the 11th–12th centuries, was discovered on the Tortkoltobe ancient settlement near the village of Vannovka, now it is named after T. Ryskulova (Rempel 1983) (Fig. 12). The object is carved from a solid piece of light gray stone and consists of two parts: the upper area is cylindrical; the lower section – is a tablelike form with a square tabletop and a thick ledge that protrudes beyond the cylindrical part. The total height of the stone object is about 35 cm. The perimeter of the cylindrical shape along the upper outer edge is about 26 cm. The height of the stand is about 12 cm. The object is decorated with images. The legs are wide, flare outwards and are slightly bisected underneath.

Later, in the area of where this vessel was discovered, while uncovering graves, there were found conical stone millstones with embellishments on the upper sections, stone troughs with legs, chapiters, stone column bases, etc. There are two more stone vessels in the Shymkent Museum. One is made in the form of a low stone container with a stylized Muslim inscription on the surface (Fig. 13.4). This vessel was discovered in 1936 in a mound, during the flooding of the Chok-Pak ravine near the village of Shakpakbaba (which was known, until 1993, as Vysokoye village). One stone vessel with short legs has an ornamental surface carved on the cylinder. Another vessel from the site of Sairam is decorated with an inscription (Rempel 1983, p. 169).

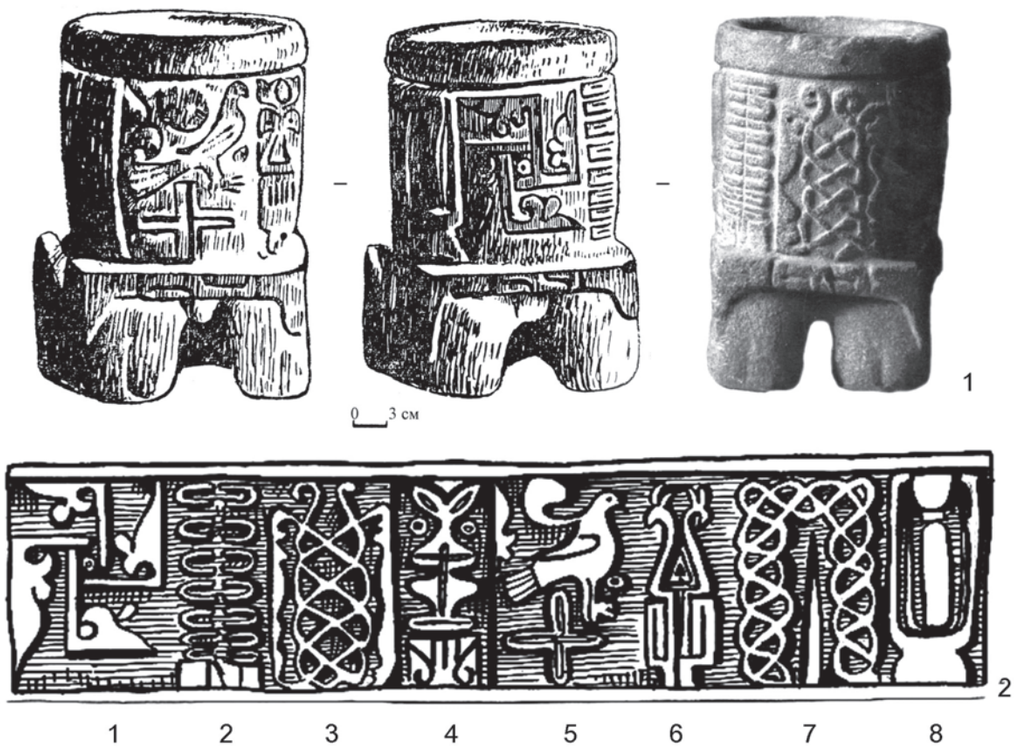

Fig. 12. Stone vessel (pyx). 11th–12th centuries. Tortkol-Tobe

A. K. Margulan noted that the stone was of great importance in the construction technology of the Sairam settlement, which can be seen from a number of monuments, some of which are stored in the museum of the city of Shymkent. Strong pillars, wells, and a staircase, leading to an underground passage at an ancient mosque, are also made of stone. In his opinion, the occurrence of a large number of ruined ancient religious buildings in Sairam is explained by the fact that, before the rise of the city of Turkestan, this was the largest settlement from which Islam spread (Margulan 1950, p. 66, Figs. 35–38). The ancient settlement on the territory of present-day Sairam corresponds to the ancient city of Ispidjab (Isfidjab), located, like Sharab, on the Great Silk Road.

Three stone vessels found on the ruins of the ancient city near the village of Balykchi date to the Karakhanid period (Senigova, 1970. P. 285. Fig. 6, 1, 2, 3). Tortkol Balykchi is identified with the medieval town of Budukhket, which was located nine *farsakhs* east of Ispidjab on the Silk Road route. The cylindrical stone vessel has a height of 13.5 cm, the diameter of the rim and bottom is 18 cm, the thickness of the upper edge is 3 cm. It is carved from a piece of light gray stone. There is an astragal relief 3 cm from the edge (Fig. 13.2). The second vessel in the form of a cylinder has a height of 21 cm, while the diameter

measures 15 cm (Fig. 13.3). It is also carved from a piece of light gray stone but, unlike the first one, it is without any relief embellishment. The third stone vessel (Fig. 13.1) is interesting because of its form and appearance. Unlike the previous two, it has a pronounced rim with a spout and a slightly sloping body; its height measures 18 cm, the diameter of the rim is 19.5 cm, and the foot is 18 cm. The body is decorated with a motif forming a blind arcade with semicircular arches, connected by large columns. A similar technique for decorating vessels was employed in the toreutics of Sassanid Iran and occurs on the silver jugs of Central Asia. Similar arches are depicted on carved wood and plaster reliefs in Central Asia and South Kazakhstan (7th–9th centuries). In analyzing the arcade compositions on Sogdian ossuaries, researchers noted a striking resemblance to images on Christian sarcophagi (Mkrtychev and Naimark 1987, p. 70–72). T. N. Senigova identified the stone vessels as mortars and suggested that their appearance "should be associated with cults widespread here, in particular, the worship of fire" (Senigova 1970, p. 285).

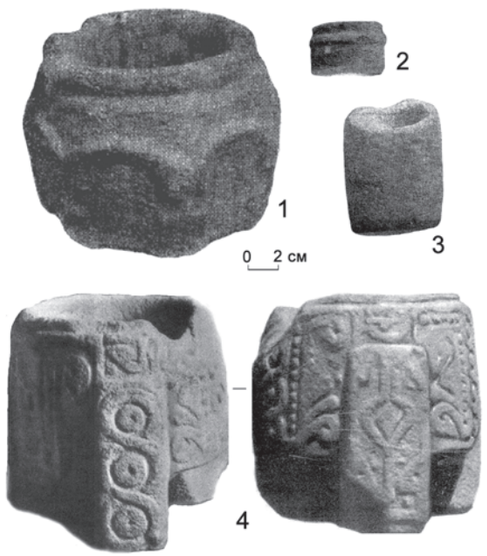

Fig. 13. Stone vessels from the 10th–12th centuries. 1–3 – Balykchy; 4 – burial mound in the Chok-Pak valley

History of the study of the vessel from Tortkoltobe (Ternovaya 2016).

The cylindrical part of the stone vessel from Tortkoltobe is decorated with patterns made by a deep relief on a smooth background. In several publications, the object is called a mortar, in others – a stone vessel of an unclear and, therefore, religious purpose. M. E. Masson, when mentioning of this vessel, noted that "the objects with ornaments of a similar style have not yet been found in other places of the region".

Description and interpretation of the vessel were presented by L. I. Rempel. This author was uncertain if the vessel from Tortkoltobe was a mortar "given that in the 4th–7th centuries the Central Asian altars of fire temples, in contrast to the Iranian-Sassanid high altars, had the form of low urns resembling mortars". The dove and the cross on the vessel, in his opinion, were religious symbols of Nestorian Christians, whose communities were widespread in Syria and existed in Semirechye; that is, "The main devotees of Nestorianism were Syrians, in their homeland this Christian "heresy" was based on ancient cults, absorbing some pagan features. It is worth mentioning that the goddess Atargatis was revered as a great mother of nature, whose symbols were the cross and the dove and, in ancient times,

was brought closer to the Mesopotamian Astarte, the Zoroastrian Anahita and, then, with the Christian "mother of God" – Mary – who arose on the foundations of the eastern cults of the goddess. Not necessarily the "Mother of God" (the Nestorians denied Mary's divinity), but something close to the Syrian pagan goddess Atargatis, Central Asian Anahita or a local deity like Umai...". The author remarked that the art of the Nestorians of Transoxiana and Semirechye was not a "splinter" of Syrian artistic culture. He wrote: "In general, the local Nestorians and the Muslims who appeared here in the 10th century exercised the same art". In the opinion of L. I. Rempel, decorative motifs are not graphically connected, and they seem to have an independent signification. The images on the vessel are ornamental embellishment and have a certain connotation (Rempel 1983).

T. N. Senigova, upon examining this vessel relied on the observations of L. I. Rempel, and noticed a resemblance between it and a manuscript stored, at that time, in the Dzhambul regional museum (now the city of Taraz). She also associated the object with Nestorian Christianity. According to T. N. Senigova, the image of a dove and the vine scroll behind it, enclosed in a rectangular frame, was associated with the equal-arm cross (Senigova 1968, pp. 64–65, Fig. 4). L. A. Belyayev interpreted the stone vessel from Tortkoltobe as a presentation of Christian symbols, with Byzantine interlace along with Islamic "arabesques" designs (Belyayev 2000, 155).

Analysis of the stone object from Tortkoltobe (Ternovaya 2016).

The determining factor, in considering form and décor, is the functional purpose of the object and its place in ritual practice. The presence of the image of the cross, allowed researchers to draw general conclusions that relates to the cult of Christianity. The object is divided into two separate forms – a table and a container, located on it in the form of a hollow thick-walled cylinder decorated with images.

According to its characteristic features, we can conclude that this item was used in the rite of the Eucharist – the main sacrament of Christians. It consists in turning the prepared gifts (bread and wine diluted with water) into the Body and Blood of Christ and the communion of believers who receive them through the acceptance of the Gifts, and with that comes: the remission of sins, the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these concepts are associated with this practice. The Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper in Christianity, is a religious rite. In the Orthodox doctrine of the faith, the Eucharist enables the worshiper to unite with God, and regular communion is necessary for a soul's salvation (Tkachenko 2008, p. 533–615).

The Christian place for the liturgy is the sanctuary, in which there is a consecrated altar or antimins – a movable table, which includes a portable altar for the celebration of the Eucharist outside the church. Written sources indicate that the practice of performing the Eucharist in the field during military or missionary expeditions existed at least since the time of Emperor Constantine the Great. For the first time, the term *antimins* was

mentioned in the life of Marcian of Syracuse (c. 700). In Byzantine descriptions of liturgical ceremonies in the church of St. Sophia, in Constantinople, the term "antimins" was used in relation to portable tables used inside the church. During the communion of the Blessed Sacrament in the church of St. Sophia, the emperors used the so-called "royal antimins" – a table decorated with cloth, which stood on a tall platform with several steps opposite the right side of the altar near the chancel screen (Silkin 2001, 489–493).

In the Orthodox tradition there are sacred (liturgical) vessels used in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist: chalice, paten, asterisk, labis (spoon), spear (the holy lance), tabernacle, pyx, and also a vessel for holy oil. The pyx (*sceuophorion*) was used to transport the consecrated eucharistic species outside the church. The pyx is a round or a cylindrical box, made of clay, wood, bone or metal, and it may be with carved with reliefs or hand-painted (Fig. 14, 9–10). Regarding the pyx-sceuophorion, the consecrated gifts are stored and carried in it for the communion of the sick, and sometimes the host (sacramental wafer) was intended for use during the blessing service. The custom of preserving the Eucharistic bread and wine arose in the 4th century. In the Christian cult, the pyx was decorated with biblical images, Christian symbols, and in Orthodoxy, it was used as a vessel for the prosphora (Eucharistic host) (Makhanko, E.N.L., 2007a. P. 201–202).

The stone object from Tortkoltobe supposedly represents a tabernacle (and possibly a pyx) in the form of an altar table with a container mounted on it. The tabernacle is in the center of the bema, and it was always sheltered (with a lid or cover) and stored on the table of the altar. The tabernacle (Greek, *ἀρτοφόριον*) is a container where consecrated bread is stored – the Body of Christ. Another name for the tabernacle is *ciborium*. Usually, it is a miniature model of the church with a small tightly closed cup or casket placed inside, and where the Holy Gifts are stored. In the Orthodox tradition, this is a vessel where the species are taken out from the prosphora during the remembrance of names during Lent and is stored there until the celebration of the liturgy. The form of the tabernacle is always church-like. Resting on the altar's holy table of the church, the tabernacle is a symbol and a vivid representation of the entire Christian church. Apart from the clergy, no one is allowed to touch this holy vessel (Makhanko et al. 2007b, p. 202–205).

Tabernacles could be made in the form of a church, a tower, a hanging metal bird, etc. In reconstructing the original Last Supper, archaeologists assumed that the pitcher for wine was stone. There could have been stone dishes also fashioned with either silver or colored glass embellishments. Jews believe that the purest kosher food is only stored in stone vessels, and only wealthy devout worshippers could afford having them.

The table depicted on the stone object from Tortkoltobe, on which the container is placed, is the altar. The altar in the Christian church is the most conspicuous piece of furniture. It is usually a stone or wooden table of exquisite work, located in the center of the bema. According to the rules of the liturgy, the altar should be facing east, towards Jerusalem in the Holy Land, where Christ was crucified. The altar is also a symbol of the tomb of Christ and

Fig. 14. 1 – Tabernacle. Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Suzdal (early – 1st quarter of the 13th century.); 2 – Tabernacle. Church of St. Stefan (Syria, Attaruti, 650); 3 – image on a sarcophagus from the basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna; 4 – image from the catacombs of Priscilla in Rome (2nd–5th centuries); 5 – Christian sarcophagus. Ravenna; 6 –tile with the image of a dove. 12th century. Kievan Rus (Galich); 7 – image of a bird on glazed ceramics from Samarkand (10th–12th centuries); 8 – a fragment of the decor of the sarcophagus of Yaroslav the Wise. 11th century; 9 – Tabernacle. 6th century. National Museum of Bargello in Florence; 10 – Tabernacle. 10th century. Byzantium. Constantinople; 11 – fragment of the bottom of the bowl from Khorezm; 12 – the chapiter of the pilaster of the 7th–8th centuries. Upper Egypt, Luxor

the place of his resurrection and eternal life (*Symbols*..., html). On the Christian sarcophagus from Ravenna (Fig. 14, 5), bisected wide legs resemble the legs of a considerable table – the altar (Bayeux 1888, p. 81, Fig. 28).

The decor embellishing the stone tabernacle from Tortkoltobe matches its purpose. Each decorative motif will be examined sequentially – from left to right, as shown in Figure 12.

1. Swastika. The first motif in Tortkoltobe relief is an ancient rendition of a swastika. This symbol is present on early Christian monuments – murals, mosaics, relief images, tombstones, manuscripts (included in the design of Gospel books), and in the decoration of clerical vestments. In the catacombs of Priscilla – that is, the Christian underground graves in Rome dating from the 2nd–5th centuries – the symbolic image of Holy Eucharist is presented in the form of a vessel with a swastika (Fig. 14, 4), where it is awarded to the soul of the righteous (symbolized by a dove) (Pavia Carlo 1985, p. 110). On the walls of the catacombs, the swastika symbol is next to the words that proclaim "life of life". It was also depicted in the window openings of the rock-cut churches of Ethiopia, Indian Hindu temples, and other sanctuaries located around the world. Originally the swastika was not a symbol of faith, it was a symbol of the Unified Law of the Universe. In Christianity, it symbolized the elements of fire and wind, embodying the Holy Spirit (Butakova 2011).

The swastika presented on the vessel from Tortkoltobe is peculiar because its cross arms sprout vegetal elements. Similar images of plants are found in the decoration of the Christian sarcophagi from Ravenna (Italy) and also these can be found on the monuments of Central Asia, such as in the carved clay decoration of Semirechye (Zhetysu) of the medieval period. On the marble sarcophagus of Yaroslav the Wise (11th century), along with images of the blooming crosses in the interwoven frames, there are ornamental motifs (Figs. 14.8), where a circle with four symmetrically arranged leaves convey movement from left to right, "revolving" around the quadrangular core (Yermonskaya, Netunakhina, and Popova, 1978). This semi-palmette motif, resembling a swastika, is represented on a tree relief from the region of the headwaters of the Zerafshan River and the main mosque in Khiva; it has been found on the reliefs, tiles, and glazed ceramics of Transoxiana and Khorezm dating to the 9th–11th centuries (Fig. 14.11) (Rempel 1983, 173).

2. Seven heavens. The second element of the Tortkoltobe composition is a pattern of seven horizontally elongated ovals connected by a vertical axis. Beneath them there is a rectangular pedestal. Similarly, oval beads were strung on the aristocratic-boyar headdresses of women of medieval Russia during 12th–13th centuries (Fig. 15.5). From the point of view of B. A. Rybakov, this jewelry reflects the macro- and microcosmos (Rybakov 1987, 563, Fig. 95).

L. I. Rempel remarked that each oval depicted on a stone object from Tortkoltobe signifies a sphere (mandorla), and in general, the image represents seven spheres or the

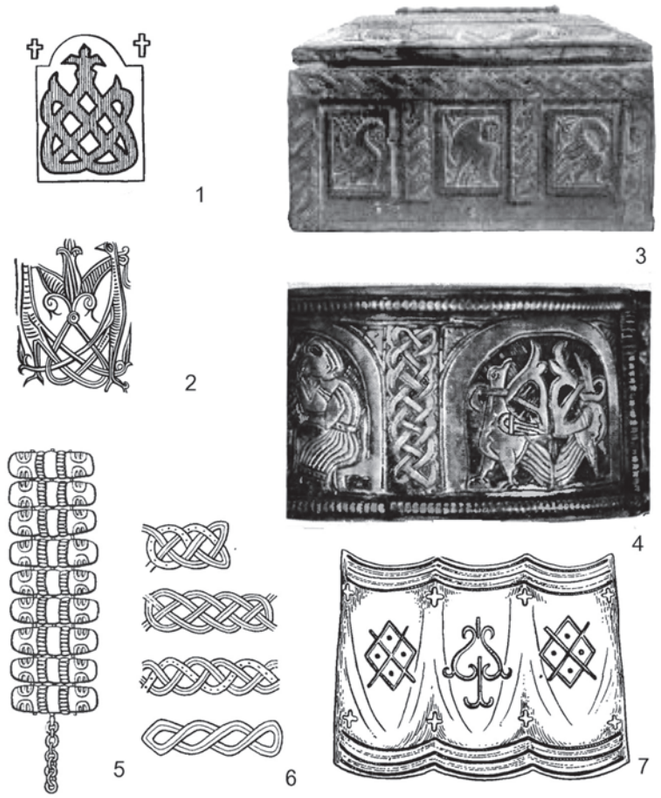

Fig. 15. 1, 2, 4–6 – Ancient Russia. 12th–13th centuries: sewn pattern on fabric (1); bracelet from Kiev (2); images on ritual bracelets (4,6); decoration for a woman's headdress (5). 7 – medieval church mural. 3 – a box-shaped container. Byzantium. Sant Yuvenai. Orieto

seven heavens (Rempel 1983, p. 173). The number seven is related to the notion that the human soul after death passes through the seven heavenly spheres. There were seven steps of initiation that existed in Mithraism. According to Jewish, Gnostic, Christian, and Sufi texts, the kingdom of God is in the seventh heaven. The central axis is the path of a person's spiritual development, which connects their soul with God.

3. Ascension. Ornamentation composed of interwoven ribbons are found on the monuments of Byzantium, ancient Russia, and Central Asia. B. A. Rybakov has interpreted interlaced ribbons (Fig. 15.1) with curved hook-shaped symbols at the ends, found in sewn patterns on fabric of the 12th–13th centuries, as a scene signifying Christ's Ascension (Rybakov 1987, p. 643, Fig. 113). This ancient tradition is seen in medieval church decoration (Fig. 15. 7) (Rybakov 1993, p. 643, Fig. 113). Made presumably in Semirechye, there is a silver dish (or paten) with gilding from the 9th–10th centuries, also inscribed with Syriac writing; its medallions have interlaced borders that frame scenes illustrating the texts of the Gospel. Among them are Crucifixion and Ascension (Fig. 16) (Darkevich and Marshak 1974, pp. 213–222).

4. Crucifixion. The fourth element of the Tortkoltobe composition is a cross placed on a dais – perhaps a symbol of the crucifix (?). The upper part of this section (with elongated ovals) are found in the design of the altars with cross decoration in the Christian art of the Byzantine Empire (Schlumberger 1905, p. 80). The bottom of the dais resembles a tamga-shaped sign. The images on seals (*neshans*) in the form of crosses within tamga-shape

signs are found on the Sassanid gems of the 4th–5th centuries (Fig. 17.1, 2) (Borisov and Lukonin 1963, Nos. 190, 195). The cross above the sign is depicted on the silver coin of Yaroslav the Wise of the 11th century (Fig. 17.3). The tamga-like signs and a cross in a circle are reproduced on a stone slab from Tashkent (Fig. 17.4) (Bogolov 2003). The areas around the cross are connected with the main stages of the annual cycle, and these are correlated with events in the life of Christ.

Fig. 16. Dish-paten. 9th–10th centuries. Semirechye. Silver with gilding

5. Cross and dove. The fifth part of the composition shows a dove above an equilateral "Greek" cross. The dove supposedly holds a ring, while either a leaf or "wing" of the bird is depicted above its back. The cross and the dove are interpreted as "the overshadowing of the cross by the Holy Spirit" (Toporov 1982, p. 14). At the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3.16–17). The image on the vessel is not associated with the Jacobites. Philoxenus the Persian, known as a translator of Holy Scriptures and the main founder of the Syriac Jacobite doctrines, rejected the use of images representing the Holy Spirit and Christ, and ordered the removal of all such icons from churches. Some Indian Jacobites still reject the use of icons today (Bartold 1964, pp. 277, 286). According to the rules of Orthodox councils, it became forbidden to depict the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, except during the Epiphany when such images were permitted.

Fig. 17. 1, 2 – Sasanian gems with neshans (4th–5th centuries); 3 – silver coin of Yaroslav the Wise (11th century); 4 – stone slab from Tashkent (according to Bogomolov 1994)

From ancient times, in Orthodoxy, there was a custom to store the Holy Eucharist in a vessel in the form of a dove soaring above the altar (Figs. 14.1,2). The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit by whose power the sacrament of the Eucharist is performed, and the use of its image as

a taber-nacle has profound meaning. The appearance of such a form of the tabernacle is associated with St. Basil the Great (4th century). At a baptism performed by St. Basil in the Jordan River, a sign was given to strengthen the faithful: "fiery lightning suddenly fell on them and a dove emerged from that lightning and dived into Jordan and, stirring up water, flew to heaven". When Basil the Great preached the "holy faith of Christ" in Caesarea of Cappadocia, calling on the goldsmiths, he ordered them to make a dove out of pure gold and then placed it above the altar "so that He would guard the Divine Mysteries...St. Basil also had such a gift of grace. When he offered the Holy Eucharist during the Liturgy, the golden dove with the Divine Gifts, hanging over the Holy Altar, moved by the power of God, and would shake three times" (*St. Demetrius*, html). In ancient times, the most common form for a tabernacle was in the shape of a dove. It was hung under the canopy that adorned the altar. This canopy was also called ciborium. The altar crowned with a canopy-ciborium resembled the Holy Sepulcher, where the Aedicula (domed chapel) is located in Jerusalem. This tradition is also known in Byzantium. There, in the famous church of St. Sophia of Constantinople, as the pilgrim Anthony of Novgorod testified, a majestic canopy also rose above the altar and underneath soared a "dove of gold", in which the Holy Eucharist "rested". The fact that the altar with a canopy and ciborium-doves never disappeared from the liturgical practice of the Russian Church is evidenced by extant documentary evidence and museum exhibits. In the altar of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Suzdal there was a unique ciborium: it was a copper dove decorated with cloisonné enamel, chased engraving, and gilding (Fig. 14.1). It was made in Limoges (France) at the end of the 13th century and delivered to Russia in the 16th century (Makhanko et al. 2007b, pp. 202–205; Bondar 2012).

An image of a dove similar to that shown on a vessel from Tortkoltobe can be seen on a tile of the 12th century (Fig. 14.6) from Galich (Kievan Rus) (Evans 1997, p. 319, no. 219). The image of a dove with a ring is also found on other Christian monuments (Fig. 14.3). On fabric of the 5th century from Egypt there is a depiction of a bird (eagle?) holding the upper part of an ankh (Piotrovsky 1998, p. 141, no. 176) – which became the Coptic cross – a symbol of ancient origin, which correlates with ideas about eternal life and immortality. A plant element or wing depicted above the dove is a motif known on glazed ceramic bowls from Sogdia of the 10th–12th centuries (Fig. 14.7) (Pugachenkova and Rempel 1965, Fig. 47).

6. Resurrection, immortality. The sixth image has the form of a "tree" or tamga-shape sign, in the upper part of which there are two bird heads with crests, turned in different directions. A pair of peacocks was often depicted on Christian monuments, including Christian sarcophagi. The peacock is a symbol of immortality. In the Christian faith, death was associated with ideas about the resurrection of Christ and the coming resurrection of the dead. After crossing the line of death the righteous are granted the Kingdom of God, a paradise arranged as a beautiful garden inhabited with birds like peacocks.

Paired zoomorphic images of heads facing in different directions are found on ancient columns. They can also be seen on the so-called "Dvukonkovsky" pendants of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture. Symbols, in the form of two-prong shapes and tridents, appear on different objects of the Saltovo-Mayak culture: building material, ceramics, bone objects, buckles, and signet-pendants. The mark could serve as a tamga, especially as a tribal or "official" signature, associated with the status of the owner, ancestral affiliation, and, possibly, it could have a semantic correlation with a deity. About four centuries separate the production of Sarmatian symbols and the bident and trident forms on the headset from the Martynovsky treasure and the Maloye Pereshepino complex.

The tamga system with bident and trident forms was fully developed in the Sasanid Iran. V. E. Flerova noted that the signs on the plaques of Old Great Bulgaria and the types of signs in the form of two-prongs and tridents with different design of the foundations of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture of the 8th – early 10th centuries are simplified versions of Iranian tamgas, representing the sacred and supreme authority of temple attendants (Flerova 2001 p. 54, Figs. 11, 12-4). According to G. Yenikhen, the "Symbols of the Rurikids", supposedly depicting a falcon, are rather similar to the Sarmatian badge of a rooster on a pole and functions as a kind of state coat of arms borrowed from Iranian rulers by later royal families, including those of Kiev (Drachuk 1975, p. 42).

7. Royal gates, gates of paradise. The seventh part of the Tortkoltobe composition depicts a gate with an open fold or curtain. The squarish arch is decorated with interwoven forms. A similar type of image is depicted on a pier chapiter from the 7th or 8th century Egypt (Fig. 14.12) and images in rectangular frames on a casket from Byzantium (Fig. 15.3) (Piotrovsky 1998, p. 153. No. 196; Schlumberger 1900, p. 8). The interlace design was popular in ancient Russia in the 12th–13th centuries and is also found in Central Asia (Figs. 15.1, 2, 4, 6).

The seventh image corresponds to the Gates of Paradise or the Royal Gates of the Orthodox Church. Located beyond the boundaries of the altar and the nave of the church are passages between the celestial, spiritual and earthly worlds; these doors not only serve as the entrance to the bema, but are also interpreted as the passage leading to the heavenly realm – the space behind the altar of the Orthodox church, a special zone occupying the eastern part of the apse, between the altar and easternmost wall. These gates serve not only a functional purpose, but also have a symbolic meaning. They signify the entrance into the kingdom of God. Christ Himself is the "door to the Kingdom of Heaven": "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved..." (John 10: 9). At each side of the royal gates' facade there were placed so-called "pillars". The pillars in most cases were square shaped in design and faced westward either frontally or in profile. At the top of the pillars were "knobs" (возглавия), which sometimes had the shape of faceted cones, and tall and narrow shafts with crosses. Sometimes the images of the Virgin and Savior were placed above the gates (Ushakov, html).

There is a well-known silver-gilt tabernacle (*artophorion*) dated to the end of the 10th century measuring 19.6×20×39 cm made in Antioch (Syria) but now is kept in the treasury of the cathedral in Aachen (Germany), which was later remade as the reliquary for St. Anastasius the Persia. It has a cube-shaped body and, at one of its side walls, there is a double-door decorated with symbols of crosses similar to church gates, an apse with arched windows, a dome on the columns, and crowned with a cross (Makhanko et al. 2007b, pp. 202–205; Evans 1997, pp. 460-461, No. 300).

8. Mortar and pestle. The definition of this image is given by L. I. Rempel. He noted that reverence for the mortar occurred in an earlier era, and was associated with the ritual of pagan cults, and in Zoroastrianism this tool was used to make *haoma* – a drink of immortality (Rempel 1983, p. 174). According to legend, when God sent the heavenly manna to the Jews in the wilderness, the people gathered it, preparing it as food for themselves. Manna was ground in millstones and in a mortar, brewed in boilers, etc. Since the content of the tabernacle (*artophorion*) is the Body of Christ (bread), the mortar depicted on the vessel could be used to crush wheat to make flour. The connection between the mortar and pestle with the symbolism of sexuality, fecundity, and fertility is undoubtedly evident.

L. I. Rempel also noted that the pestle has a shape resembling a column with a capital (Rempel 1983, p. 170). Ciboria and royal doors were embellished with similar columns. In Christianity, the column was used as the place of spiritual escape by the so-called Stylites. The reason for the ascetics to climb the column was desire for solitude facilitating prayerful union with God. From ancient times, columns were revered as models of faith and Christian piety.

Regarding the Tortkoltobe object, the stone tabernacle in the form of a cylindrical receptacle on the altar table could have been used in a Christian church on the altar or used as a portable altar-pyx for communion outside the church. Presumably, this practice was similar to the Orthodox Christian tradition. The Orthodox in the East are Melkites (from the Aramaic word "melk" – the king, that is, supporters of the Byzantine Emperor) (Zalesskaya 1998, p. 13). The Khorezmian Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973–1048) stated that the Central Asian "Christians are divided into several denominations. The first one is the Melkites, that is, the *Romans*; they are called so because their emperor (professes) the doctrine of this sect; there are no other Christians in Rome [i.e. Constantinople]. The second (denomination) is the Nestorians. They build their doctrine on teaching of Nestorius, who announced it around seven hundred and twentieth year after the (era) of Alexander. The third (denomination) is Jacobites ... The Melkites and Nestorians are superior to all (other Christians) in number, since the Romans and the surrounding nations are entirely Melkites, and most of the inhabitants of Syria, Iraq, and Khorasan are Nestorians. As for the Jacobites, most of them are Copts, as well as the inhabitants of places adjacent to Egypt" (Biruni 1957, p. 317).

The missionary preachers came to South Kazakhstan and Semirechye from Byzantium through the territory of Central Asia, but the fact of penetration by another route cannot be denied. In ancient Russia, the adoption of Christianity as a state religion occurred at the end of the 10th century under Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich. The bronze plaques with the image of the so-called "Symbols of the Rurikids" were found in Semirechye, on the settlement of Krasnyaya Rechka (Baipakov and Ternovaya 2003; Baipakov, Ternovaya and Goryacheva, 2007, Figs. 149, 308–2).

Christian monuments of northeast Semirechye (Ili Valley) 12th–14th centuries

Archaeological research has shown that in the northeastern Semirechye (Zhetysu), in the valley of the Ili River, there are ruins of ancient and medieval settlements. By the period of the 10th – early 13th centuries, their number totaled around 80. The establishment of settlements stimulated development of trade and crafts. At this time, one of the branches of the Great Silk Road passed through the Ili Valley and led to Central Kazakhstan. The largest cities were those mentioned in written sources: Talkhiz, Iki-Oguz, Kayalyk, and Ilibalyk (Baipakov 1998, pp. 155–156). Merchants from neighboring regions and distant countries used to come here. Next were monks and priests preaching religion, including Christianity.

Information about a few cities of this region is provided in the work of Guillaume de Rubrouck – a Franciscan monk, ambassador of the French King Louis IX to the great khan (kagan) of the Mongol empire – Möngke (1251–1259), the grandson of Genghis Khan. Rubrouck visited Kailak (the city of Kayalyk) in November 1253, on his way to Karakorum (Pian del Carpine and Rubrouck 1957, pp. 126–133). The city of Kayalyk was a capital of the Karluk state and, later, as a large city in the Chagatai ulus, it was located on the Great Silk Road. Nearby, the ancient Antonovsky fortress was part of that settlement – the largest in the Ili Valley (Bartold 1963, p. 51, and 1966, p. 105; Baipakov 1986, p. 36). Rubrouck spent two weeks there, collecting interesting information – first, about the religious life of the city and surrounding settlements. He said: "We left the aforementioned city (Kailak) on the feast of St. Andrew and there nearby, in three leagues, we found an entirely Nestorian settlement. Having entered their church, we sang with joy as loudly as we could: "Ave, Regina," [Hail, Queen] since we have not seen a church for a long time" (Pian del Carpine and Rubrouck 1957, p. 133). The "Nestorian village" has been identified as the Lepsy fortification, located 6 km east of the Antonovsky settlement (Baipakov 1986, p. 36). It is located on the left coast of the Lepsy River. Unfortunately, the territory of the settlement is occupied by a garden, thus it is difficult to conduct research on it. One Christian artifact found in the region of Kayalyk includes a fragment of a ceramic vessel with the relief of an equal-arm cross (Fig. 3).

The large medieval city of Talkhiz is identified with the ancient settlement located north of the modern city of Talgar in the Almaty region. In the geographical treatise *Khudud al-Alam* (982/983) by an unknown Persian-speaking author, two sites are listed as "TÜN.L

(*Tong) and TÄLKH.ZA (Talhiza), villages surrounded by mountains, on the border between the Chigils and Khallukhs (Karluks). The residents are warlike, courageous, and valiant" (*Hudüd al-'Älam* 1982, p. 98; Baipakov 1986, p. 35). Talgar is located on the northern slopes of the Zaili Alatau, 25 km east of the modern city of Almaty.

In the ancient settlement of Talgar, traces of Christianity (Nestorianism) are exemplified by some artefacts of bronze: a sculpture of the crucifixion of Christ, a cross, and cylinders decorated by crosses. A Christian cross was discovered at one excavation site near two cylinders. This further confirms their attribution as Christian. In an article by I. I. Kopylova and L. I. Kerekesha the finds are defined as cylindrical braces for fastening tent pillars, similar to those stored in the museum of the city of Bishkek and in the Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg, Russia) (Kopylov and Kerekesha 1992, pp. 127, 132). Obviously, the authors of the publication of 1993 relied on the opinion of A. A. Ivanov after consultation with L. T. Guzalyan, whose Hermitage cylinders were kept in a storage vault until his death in 1994 (Ivanov 2008, pp. 381–385) (see below).

Bronze cylinders from Talgar (Fig. 18, photo 2) were discovered in different years. These are casted, hollow inside, and surrounded by protruding rims or triangular flanges on each end. In the middle is a rib that surrounds the cylinder and protrudes at the level of the rims. Another three cylinders, of a similar form, were found previously, while there was another fragment discovered by an expedition led by T. V. Savelyeva in 2002.

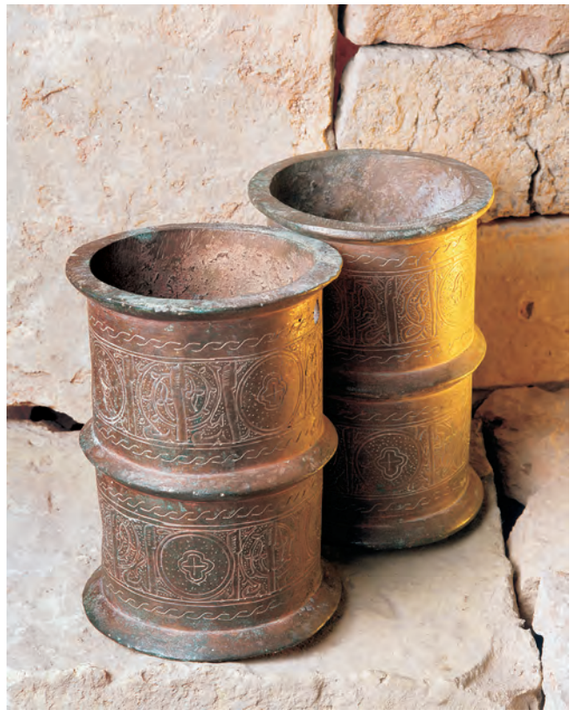

Fig. 18. Bronze cylinders from Talgar 12th early 13th century

The length of these cylinders is 175 mm, the inner diameter is 103–105 mm, the height and thickness of the upper and lower sections are 11 mm, the middle rib is 8 mm, and the wall thickness is 3 mm. The openings are somewhat round with a diameter of 10 mm adjacent to the rim flange. The openings on each end negates its function as a container and so, of course, they must have another functional purpose.

One cylinder is decorated with two ornamental registers with Arabic inscriptions. The other two intact cylinders and the fragment are

decorated with a similar decoration – three Arabic letters are shown on the background consisting of plant elements and dots, and between them there are four pairs of circles with equal-arm crosses, which are encircled by four-petalled flowers rendered in double lines. The rest of the interior space is filled with dots. Above and below the main decorative strip there is an ornament composed of curved lines forming a spiral motif.

Casted bronze cylinders, differing in size, details, and decor, were discovered in 1941 in the Chuy valley – on the Aleksandrovsky ancient settlement and the Belovodskaya fortress in Kyrgyzstan. The cylinders, found on the Aleksandrovsky settlement, differs from the other examples of the same scale. It measures 28.5 cm in length, 20.5 cm in diameter, and the wall thickness is up to 1 cm. The form has two ribs surrounding the rims round the openings. The decor consists of Arabic inscriptions, made in Kufic-style writing and close to Naskh script. The background of the inscriptions contains spirals with palmettes.

Both sections of the cylinders are decorated with complex symmetrically carved decoration. The décor includes four round medallions, outlined with a wide or narrow border and arranged crosswise. The medallions contain geometrical forms, unlike the Talgar examples, where the crosses are depicted. Between the round medallions there are stylized Arabic inscriptions in Kufic style (Bernshtam 1950, p. 141, Tab. XCI–XCII). The combination of inscriptions with ornament allowed the State Hermitage Museum curator A.A. Ivanov to date them to the 12th to early 13th century (Ivanov 2008, p. 381). In the *Chuy Valley* book, the cylinders from Kyrgyzstan are defined as massive sockets for Nestorian candlesticks (Bernshtam 1950, 141).

The "History of Kyrgyzstan" mentions that large bronze containers, with a height of about 30 cm and a diameter of 15 cm, covered with ornamentation, were used in artworks. The surface of two large shafts are notable for its craftsmanship, having an image of four tigers or leopards (?) moving to the left, rendered in high relief. The reproduction of this cylinder was provided in that book. There is no information on the findspot and where they are current stored. A. A. Ivanov remarks that, regarding bronze cylinders from the Chuy Valley as "Nestorian candlesticks", A. N. Bernstam did not explain why they are decorated with Arabic inscriptions of blessing (12th–13th centuries) (Ivanov 2008, p. 381). Unfortunately, A. N. Bernstam also did not mention the circumstances of the find. Perhaps, such identification was connected with the associated finds.

Arabic inscriptions are sometimes found on bronze items belonging to Nestorian Christians. The collection of the State Hermitage Museum has two interesting bronze or brass trays with silver inlay, which are identified as Nestorian. One tray with a diameter of 43.1 cm was made in Syria in the middle of the 13th century and purchased in Kashgar in 1898 (Yakubovsky 1938, pp. 209–216, Tab. 23–27). It is decorated with an Arabic inscription of blessing, reliefs of animals, and floral decoration. The curls with palmettes resemble the ornament adorning the cylinders from Talgar. The inscription was translated by A. A. Ivanov. The last lines are taken from Arabic verses: "... Glory and long happiness,

and longevity (of life) to you, o lord, exalted dignity, and glory and manifold happiness forever...". Interesting images shows Nestorian clerics (deacons and deaconesses) carrying crosses, *ripidia* (fans), and censers. According to experts, the nature of the arrangement of the figures in twelve niches and the interpretation of the characters reveals the hand of an Islamic master who copied a Nestorian prototype. "Such monuments reflected the tastes as well as the political ambitions of the Ayyubid dynasty, which was interested in supporting the influential Nestorian trading elite." The second tray was made in the first half of the 13th century in Iraq. It is decorated with Arabic inscriptions, images of feasting, and in the center there is a ruler surrounded by servants. The iconographic design of this scene has analogies among the miniatures of the so-called Mesopotamian school, which allowed researchers to link the production of the tray to the territory of Iraq. Based on the interpretation of the ornament in the background of the central medallion, it has been concluded that there is some influence of the bronze objects of Khorasan of the 12th – early 13th century. The inscription of blessing on the edge was made in the Naskh script (Piotrovsky 1998, pp. 196, 197, figs. 263, 264).

Consequently, the combination of crosses, ornamentation, and Arabic inscriptions on the bronze cylinders from Talgar allows us to include them in our grouping of Nestorian monuments.

Candleholders or as fasteners of tent pillars? There is no consensus on the functional use of the cylinders. As mentioned above, A.N. Bernshtam defined them as "shafts for Nestorian candlesticks". The State Historical Museum of Moscow has two bronze cylinders with Arabic inscriptions included by V. A. Gorodtsov among Turkestan finds. In his opinion, these finds are "parts of ancient copper, apparently for tall candlesticks, shaped like Christian church candlesticks".

According to A. A. Ivanova, sometime between 1983 and 1988, an employee of the Hermitage L. T. Gyuzalyan showed him "one such object and asked if it could not be a stand (something like a base), for example, for any pillar". A. A. Ivanov promised to think about it and soon found the answer. Examining publications devoted to the Persian miniature, he saw similar objects on thin tent pillars: they served as couplings that fastened the poles together into one support; these were convenient, for example, in camping with the temporary erection of a tent, marquee, or awning (this is clearly seen on miniatures of Iran and Central Asia of the 15th–17th centuries) (Ashrafi 1974, p. 82, Fig. 67).

A. A. Ivanov told L. T. Gyuzalyan about this and soon forgot about these coupling-shafts, used for fastening together pairs of poles. In 1994, after the death of L. T. Gyuzalyan two bronze cylinders of the same shape were found in his possession. One is 28.5 cm tall, and the second is 28 cm, their outer diameter is 20.0–20.8 and 21 cm. The cylinders have protruding ribs with a slightly triangular profile. The shafts are divided into three parts by two ribs. On each cylinder, two registers are carved with Arabic inscriptions made in large

Naskh script against the background of spiral vegetal forms with palmettes. In the middle register, there are four figures of animals from the feline family. In the middle part of the cylinders there are two hook-shaped protrusions.

It would seem that the question of the function of cylinders has been answered. According to the conclusion of A. A. Ivanov, hollow bronze cylinders are couplings for fastening tent pillars. "These couplings have nothing to do with lamps, particularly Nestorian ones, so the mystery of these objects was successfully resolved" (Ivanov 2008, p. 384). However, when considering these objects in their original context among archaeological materials, most of the author's arguments against the previously presented identification become untenable.

This paper analyzes the purpose of the cylinders found in the territory of the Talgar settlement. It was shown above that Arabic inscriptions could be found on Nestorian bronze objects.

Successful excavations at Talgar include the discovery of intact bronze lamps of the 11th–12th centuries. Their tall shafts were attached to the three-legged stands, assembled from various parts. Plates with a flat bottom were attached above the shafts; then a lamp was place at the top (Baipakov, Savelyeva, and Chang 2005, Fig. 103). If the plate is placed at top of the bronze cylinders, and then a chirag above that, then such an assemblage could be used as a lamp. However, each cylinder has one round hole for mounting, which involves the insertion of a wooden pillar. The joining of these cylinders and wooden poles could possibly be used as church candlesticks.

Was it possible to use Talgar cylinders as couplings for attaching tent pillars? If two fragments of a column were connected in the central part (as shown in miniatures), the rather heavy cylinders from Talgar arranged in pairs would hardly have been able to resist the tension. There is only one opening with a diameter of about 1 cm, for mounting in each cylinder.

Another use of the cylinder was proposed as a variation of the hypothesis of L. T. Gyuzalyan. The cylinder could be used as a stand (base) for pillar (Ivanov 2008, 383). The remains of wooden pillars were revealed during careful excavation at the site IV in the central part of the Talgar settlement. In addition to the pillars, there were recorded crumbling fragments of other wooden structures (Baipakov, Savelyeva, and Chang 2005, Fig. 3, 4). The pillars supporting the flat ceiling had a diameter of about 20 cm, they had no base and were dug into the floor. At the same excavation, there were recorded single traces of posts with a diameter of about 10 cm, also sunk deep into the earthen floor. Perhaps the cylinders could have been used as an additional mount at the bottom of the pillars (?). A bronze plate (part of the lamp) was also found at this excavation site.

Having determined that the cylinders belong to the group of Christian artifacts, we can also consider them, for example, as components of the pillars for the altar canopy or ciborium – a shelter on four columns above the tabernacle. In Christian art, there are images

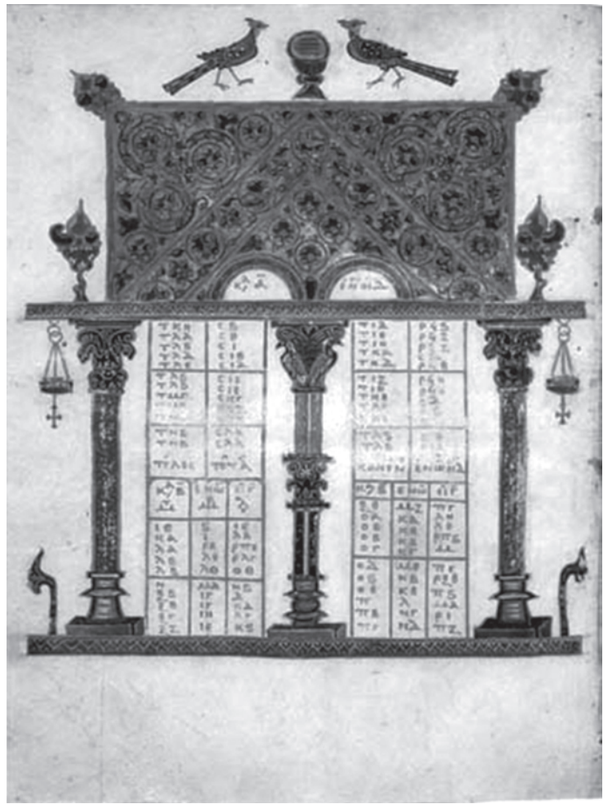

Fig. 19. Illustration from the Gospel (22×17 cm). The end of the 11th–12th centuries. Byzantium (Constantinople) Tempera on parchment (Evans, 1997)

of columns supporting arches and the altar canopy. Cylindrical parts were used for the columns (Fig. 19) (Schlumberger 1900, p. 261; Evans 1997, p. 93, Fig. 46).

In conclusion, it can be noted that the bronze cylinders are found in different places and they differ in size and details, which probably indicates different purposes.

Kairaks of Ili Valley. *Evidence of Christianity from Ucharal*. The ancient settlement of Ucharal has been identified with the medieval city of Ilibalyk. This city is listed in the Gandzak's description of the journey of the "pious and Christ-loving Armenian king" Hethum I, who ruled Cilicia and was enthroned in the city of Sis. The king's embassy was accepted at the capital of Möngke Khan, where they concluded an agreement with the Mongols and received a promise of reduced taxes. On November 1, 1254, "(the king) left them", having visited a number of settlements (Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 222–224). These sites correspond to toponyms found in Muslim historical sources dated between 1329 and 1331, such as city of *Alualeh* from Ganzak's list which corresponds to *Almalyk*; *Dalas* is *Taraz*; and *Ilanbaleh* corresponds with *Ilibalyk*.

A presumably Nestorian kairak, a tombstone with a cross and an inscription that has not yet been deciphered (Fig. 20), has been found in the ancient settlement of Ucharal (Baipakov, Savelyeva, and Petrov 2015, pp. 94–97, Fig. 3–6. [Editor's note: This inscription has since been translated by Dr. Mark Dickens and is provided in the following chapter.]

Three coin hordes and 123 stray-coins were discovered also in Ucharal. All three hordes consist mainly of dirhams of the 13th–15th centuries. The collection of single finds can be divided into three groups: (1) coins minted before the Mongol conquest; (2) coins of the Great Mongol Empire and; (3) coins of the Chagatai Khanate. No coin minted after

the middle of the 14th century has been discovered. The vast majority of imperial coins found in the Ucharal settlement were minted in Almalyk, the capital center of the Chagatai ulus, located no more than two days away (now in the People's Republic of China). In addition to Almalyk coins, the settlement also contains currency of the neighboring mints of Kayalyk, Pulad and Imil, as well as an unidentified mint (Baipakov, Savelyeva, and Petrov 2015, p. 94–97).

Kairaks from Almalyk. The ruins of the medieval city of Almalyk – the residence of the Chagatai khans in the 13th–14th centuries, are located near the Chinese-Kazakhstan border. The location of Almalyk was accurately described in the itinerary of Chang-Chung, a Chinese Taoist monk who wrote a report of his journey to Genghis Khan in 1218 (Bartold 1963, p. 58). Chang-Chung related that the city was located one day west of the exit from the Talki Pass or the Talki Gorge, which connected the Ili Valley with the Borotaly Valley. Under Mongol rule, one of the most important trade routes from western to eastern Asia passed through the Ili Valley, which contributed to the rise of this main city of the region. It was 45 days from Otrar to Almalyk, two weeks from Almalyk to Bishbalyk (the capital of Uighuria). As the main city of the Chagatai domain, Almalyk was one of the original centers of activity of the Nestorian and, later, medieval European missionaries, who spread Catholicism in the Mongol possessions. In the 1330s under Changshi khan, Catholics had a bishop and a beautiful church in Almalyk. The activity of the Catholics ceased because of the bloody persecution of Christians in 1339 or 1340 by Ali Sultan.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian researcher N. N. Pantusov was in Chinese-occupied areas in the Kegen region as

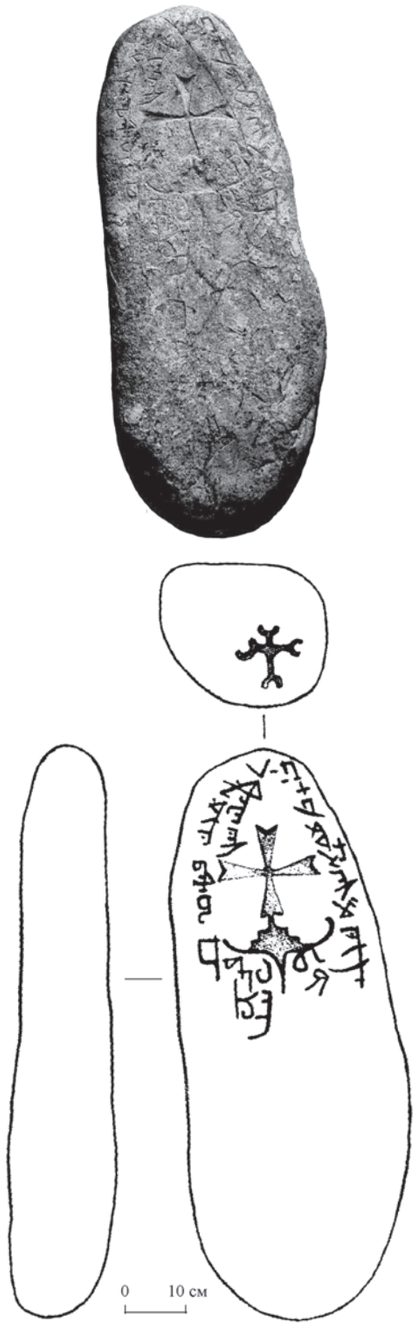

Fig. 20. Kairak – gravestone of 13th–14th centuries. Ucharal ancient settlement

a representative of the Russians at the extraordinary international congress of Russian and Chinese nationals. Returning in the evening from the nearest village of Mazara, the Kuldja aqsaqal (village leader) brought to the congress secretary a stone with a cross and an inscription, as well two coins – one in silver, the other in copper. The stone was only half of its original size, since the other half was broken off. There was a depiction of cross on it and on both sides there were Syriac inscriptions. This stone and coins were handed over to the aqsaqal by the muezzin of the Mazar mosque of Mohammed Yusup, who found them in the ruins of an ancient city located five miles southwest of Mazar. The location of the find was examined. It was a ruin stretching over a vast space of several miles on both sides of the Kegen River. This area was called Altunlyk-Shagar (Golden City). N. N. Pantusov published images of 11 stones found at Almalyk (Fig. 21, 22) (Pantusov 1910, p. 161–188).

P. K. Kokovtsev examined 11 inscriptions on gravestones introduced by N. N. Pantusov during 1902–1903, partly in photographs and partly by firsthand examination of the originals, and presented his findings to the Imperial Archaeological Commission and the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society (Kokovtsev 1905, pp. 190–200). One of the inscriptions (No. 11) recorded the Turkic language, the rest were in the Syriac language, with the exception of the end of inscription No 9, and one of the three unclear inscriptions, which could not be completely understood by the estampage. The inscriptions Nos. 2, 9 and 11 were dated to the second half of the 14th century. The stones from Almalyk represent documentary evidence of the existence of the Christian community. Their existence was previously testified by literary descriptions and the epigraphy of the Semirechye inscriptions, in which the natives or the indigenous inhabitants of Almalyk were repeatedly mentioned; for example, one “chor bishop Iukhanan Siamert from Almalyk”, three priests, and two lay women (Kokovtsov 1905, 200).

In 1904, after an intermission of discoveries, the Asian Museum of the Imperial Academy of Sciences was provided with a new, but small collection of interesting Syriac inscriptions from Semirechye (Kokovtsov 1907, pp. 427–460). The fact that these kairaks were received from Kuldja provided general reasons to assume that these stones were dug or uncovered from the ruins of nearby Almalyk. All these inscriptions were in Syriac. Inscription No.1 provided the dates of 1301–1302. The date of inscription No. 2 was damaged and cannot be read. Most of the inscriptions were carved on the stone, and two of them (No. 5 and No. 10) were carved in relief. Except for stone No. 9, all kairaks were decorated with crosses resting on a stepped pedestal or “hillock” (symbol of Calvary). There were more complex images on two stones (No. 1 and No. 2) besides the crosses.

Kairak No. 1 deserves special attention due to the interesting composition, in which an image is carved in the center between the lines of the Syriac inscription (Fig. 23). The image shows a peculiar pedestal consisting of six rectangular sections that are X-shaped and narrow at the middle; above this is a cross of the usual Semirechye type with the

Fig. 21. Images on kairaks from Almalyk. Numbering according to N. N. Pantusov (1910)

Fig. 22. Kairak No. 9 from Almalyk (according to: Pantusov, 1910)

Fig. 23. Kairak No. 1 (according to: Pantusov, 1907)

Fig. 24. Lid of reliquary. 8th–9th centuries. Syria. Silver, black, gilding. Diamete – 3,5 cm

Fig. 25. Dish-Paten with the image of angels by sides of the cross, 6th century. Syria. Silver, gilding. Diameter – 18.6 cm

flaring arms. Flanking the cross are figures of two angels (the Archangels Michael and Gabriel – Christ's companions on early Christian monuments) in a bowed pose. At the bottom of the cross there is a plant with spiky leaves, three on each side of the base of the cross. The heads and bodies of angels are inclined towards the leaves. They have curly hair and wings behind their backs. Both angels are dressed in long, peculiar tunics, open in front, belted at the waist. The entire composition, along with the Syriac inscription is in a pentagonal design bordered by an ornamental edge. The inscription is almost faded. The lines containing a date cannot be read. There is a mention of the name of Alexander the Great which is unusual for Syriac inscriptions of the Semirechye (Kokovtsev 1907, 429).

Fig. 26. Kairak from Almalyk No. 2 (according to: Kokovtsov, 1907)

On a silver lid of the 8th–9th centuries from Syria, there are figures of two saints depicted in prayer flanking a tree on a stepped pedestal (Fig. 24). The poses of these angels with their faces frontal and bodies in profile resembles those figures beside the Blessed Virgin Mary on a gold Byzantine pectoral cross now in the British Museum. In comparison, there is also the example of the well-known miniature depicting Jesus Christ sitting on the throne with two angels at both sides. Angels, standing beside the cross, are reproduced on a silver dish-paten (Syria, 6th century) from the collection of S. G. Strogonov (Fig. 25) (Kokovtsev 1907, Fig 3; Piotrovsky 1998, pp. 33, 190, Ill. 27, 257).

Kairak No. 2, like stone No. 1, is decorated with the composition on the front surface, but unfortunately it has eroded (Fig. 26). Nevertheless one can see a small hill or pedestal, and at its base one can distinguish a tree, that is, a small cross standing on a spherical base. The upper, vertical edge of the cross seems to be covered with some kind of symbolic ornamentation, and located above the cross, a figure resembling a bird in profile, with its head turned to the right side, and it has with wings raised upwards, and a long peacock tail.

The themes of ancient Christian art, reproduced on these two stones, were known in the Central Asian, where examples from the Byzantine East – Syria and Asia Minor – spread into the region (Kokovtsov 1907, Tab. I, II).

Conclusion

The expansion of Christianity in the medieval period has been confirmed by rare, but unique artifacts found in south Kazakhstan and Semirechye-Zhetysu region – pectoral crosses, jewelry, inscriptions, funerary stones, etc. The terracotta object from Taraz dates back to the 5th–6th centuries, the earthenware vessel from Taraz with a Christian (Jacobite) inscription of the names "Peter" and "Gabriel" and pectoral cross from the necropolis of Kostobe – date to the 6th–8th centuries. The funerary khum with the image of a cross from Taraz is dated by 9th–10th centuries, and the winepress with images of crosses discovered in the ancient settlement of Aktobe Stepninskoye date to the 11th–12th centuries. Dastarkhan tables with supposed Christian symbols were found during excavations of Lugovoye G (a suburb of Kulan) in layers of the 7th–9th and the 9th–10th centuries.

The rare finds include a stone vessel of the 11th–12th centuries from Tortkoltobe (medieval Sharab city), identified as a tabernacle (ciborium); it could also be used as a portable altar-pyx for communion outside the church. Such objects belong to the sacred (liturgical) vessels used in the main sacrament of Christians – the Eucharist. The sections that decorate the vessel correspond to its purpose and sequentially line up in a form of narrative.

The Talgar bronze cylinders with crosses and Arabic inscriptions, and with floral motifs in the background date to the 12th or early 13th centuries. The Christian monuments of the Ili Valley date to the 13th through the 14th centuries based on the kairaks (tombstones) from Almalyk and those found in Ucharal village (Ilibalyk).

In the 13th century the paths of the "pious Christ-loving Armenian king Hethum" passed through Semirechye-Zhetysu and south Kazakhstan. Similarly, monks of the Franciscan order, Giovanni Pian del Carpine and Guillaume de Rubrouck, left a record describing the Christian church in a village near the city of Kayalyk. Christians were mentioned in the cities of Ispidjab and Sairam according to a written source of the 14th–19th centuries concerning the story about Iskhak Baba.

Archaeological and epigraphic finds, together with written sources, show a picture of the expansion of Christianity in Southern Kazakhstan and Semirechye from the 6th–7th to 14th centuries.

Ucharal-Ilibalyk: The discovery of a new medieval Christian community on the Ili River

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(United States and Kazakhstan)

Kairaks are monumental stones used as grave markers in medieval Central Asia. Over one hundred thirty years ago, imperial Russian officials and scholars gathered more than 630 such objects in today's Kyrgyzstan and in western China (Chwolson 1890, 1897).[1] At that time, philologists focused mostly on translating the kairaks' inscriptions, recovering the recorded names, dates, and epitaphs; unfortunately, the harvesting and excavation of these objects were somewhat haphazard and not fully published, and so the archaeological context was mostly lost (see above, chapter 1, Figs. 21, 22; and below, Chapter 3, Figs. 40–42). Moreover, these kairaks were dispersed around the world to various institutions, while others disappeared; in time, these important monoliths were almost forgotten by scholars in western Europe and America. Matters worsened following the Communist Revolution in 1917 which resulted in the establishment of the Soviet Union which discouraged the study of religious history while causing Central Asia to be inaccessible to western scholars.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, excavations in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan began to uncover new Christian sites, revitalizing the investigation of kairaks and their historical context. Then, in the year 2014, the first kairak was discovered today's Republic of Kazakhstan in the Ili Valley, near the border of Xinxiang (China). This gravestone was inscribed with a cross and Syriac letters conveying the Old Turkic language, suggesting a "Church of the East" community (i.e. Nestorian or Jacobite) (see above, chapter 1, Fig. 20).[2] As explained below, this monument has been dubbed the *Petros Kairak* and, immediately, its significance was recognized. The prospects of examining a previously unknown cemetery,

[1] See Dr. Kolchenko's excellent historiography in Chapter 3 of this volume.

[2] Scholarship over the past 30 years has cast doubt on the usefulness of the name "Nestorian" for Christians in Central Asia, simply because they referred to themselves as "the Church of the East"; however, this term (Nestorian) is so widespread in previous scholarly materials that it cannot be easily discarded without explanation (Brock 1996).

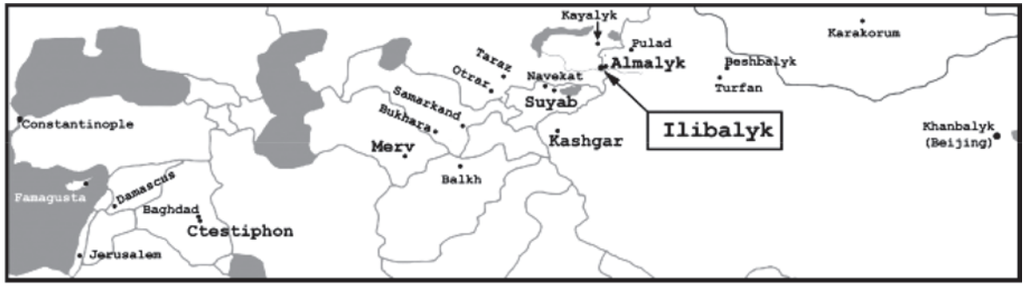

Fig. 1. Simplified Map indicating the geographical location of Ucharal-Ilibalyk and other medieval cities mentioned in this chapter with modern boundaries (C. A. Stewart)

with their kairaks in situ using modern archaeological techniques and technologies, could shed new light dramatically–not just on the history of Kazakhstan – but those earlier kairaks that have lost their provenance in Kyrgyzstan and western China.

The *Petros Kairak* was located in an agricultural field just outside the village of Ucharal (Fig. 1). Its discovery was first reported by a local schoolteacher to the late Professor Karl Baipakov, one of Kazakhstan's most well-known archaeologists who had previously documented the rich and varied history of ancient and medieval Asia (2001, p. 141–75; 2012). Baipakov was familiar with the Semirechye-Zhetysu area, since he had directed many excavations throughout the region, including the Koilyk village – approximately 230 km north of Ucharal – where the important medieval city of *Kayalyk* once stood, near the Dzungarian Gate leading into Xinxiang (Baipakov and Voyakin 2006). At Baipakov's encouragement, Dr. Dimitry Voyakin led a team of archaeologists to recover the *Petros Kairak* and they transferred it to their field laboratory belonging to the cultural management company Archaeological Expertise in Talgar (Kazakhstan). This discovery was not a surprise for Dr. Baipakov since he had already proposed in 1986 that the modern village of Ucharal was an important historical settlement, but never had the opportunity to substantiate his claim (1986, p. 36).

Preliminary investigations of Ucharal began in 2014, during which the geography, architectural remains, and surface ceramics were surveyed. At that time, villagers provided archaeologists with three coin hoards, as well as 123 individual stray coins. These coins were composed primarily of issues minted between the 13th to 14th centuries, though there were also coins dating as early as the 11th century (Petrov et al., 2014). Naturally, questions arose regarding the relationship between the *Petros Kairak* and this previously unknown medieval city. After analyzing historical texts, Baipakov identified the site as *Ilibalyk* where, in the year 1255, King Hetum I of Armenian Cilicia visited (Baipakov et al. 2015).[3] Thus, in this chapter, we will refer to the site as Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* (Fig. 2).

[3] All dates in this chapter refer to the so-called "Common Era" (CE), commonly to English-language scholarship, otherwise known as *Anno Domini* (AD) based on the medieval Latin system of chronology.

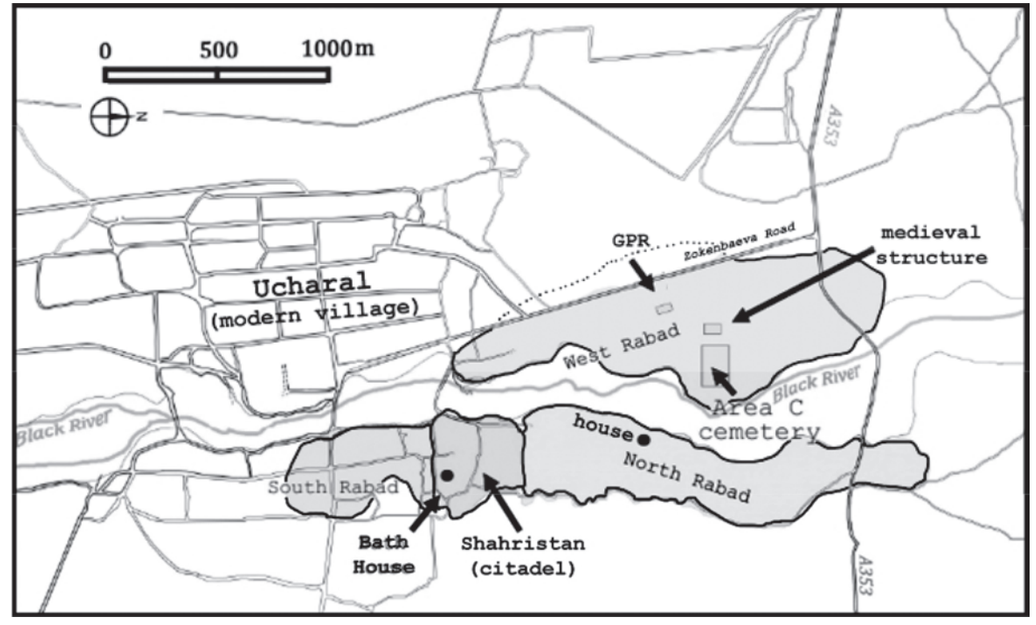

Fig. 2. Plan illustrating the archaeological areas of Ucharal-Ilibalyk (C. A. Stewart)

***Ucharal*-Ilibalyk *Excavations*.** An international project involving archaeologists from Archaeological Expertise (Kazakhstan) and the Tandy Institute for Archaeology (Texas, USA) along with a major grant from the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (Switzerland), combined efforts to analyze this extensive site covering five square km.[4] Because the site is on public land and often visited by vandals, artifact hunters, and sometimes used as a landfill, our research plan included the recording and preserving of the archaeological landscape. Our first systematic excavations commenced in the summer of 2016, beginning with a pedestrian ground survey, utilizing drone photogrammetry and ground penetrating radar (GPR), and this determined the extent of the ancient city's topography and layout. Excavations were conducted in three areas of the medieval city. First, the *shahristan* (central fortified area) was easily identifiable because mudbrick ramparts still stand above ground, though much eroded. Second, the *north rebad* (residential, commercial, and industrial zone), just north of the shahristan, could be identified by the surface ceramics. Third, several test trenches were excavated northwest of the shahristan, in the field where the *Petros Kairak* was first uncovered; here it was presumed that a cemetery existed as part of the west rebad.

The excavations in the shahristan exposed several important features. A large collection of artifacts was uncovered, including a variety of ceramic sherds (glazed fine wares, jugs,

[4] It should be mentioned that support and funding also came from several other sources such as: the Archaeological Society of Kazakhstan Fund, Friends of Archaeology Society (Houston, Texas), and the University of St. Thomas (Houston).

plates, storage jars) and metal accessories. At a depth of about 1.5 meters, remains of a monumental bath house (*hamam*) was uncovered, consisting of (as so far excavated) four separate chambers, reflecting the four stages of bathing chambers developed earlier in the Roman empire: an apodyterium (dressing room), caldarium, tepidarium, frigidarium (Figs. 3 and 4).[5] A hypocaust system consisting of ten rows of fired brick held up the caldarium's pool, which was the largest chamber measuring 4×5.5 m, presumably vaulted by mudbricks. Its tepidarium (or frigidarium) was likely covered with a dome since two large buttresses were later added to strengthen the west and south walls; the room was also paved with flag stones and included a drain at the southern end flowing into ceramic pipes, much like the larger bath complex excavated at Taraz dated to the 10th to 11th centuries (Baipakov et al. 2012). Coins were found in stratigraphic infilling of the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* baths, indicating two chronological phases from the 12th and 13th

Fig. 3. Aerial view (drone) of the bath house (hamam) (top north) as excavated in 2018 within the shahristan at Ucharal -Ilibalyk (Photo: Archaeological Expertise, LLP)

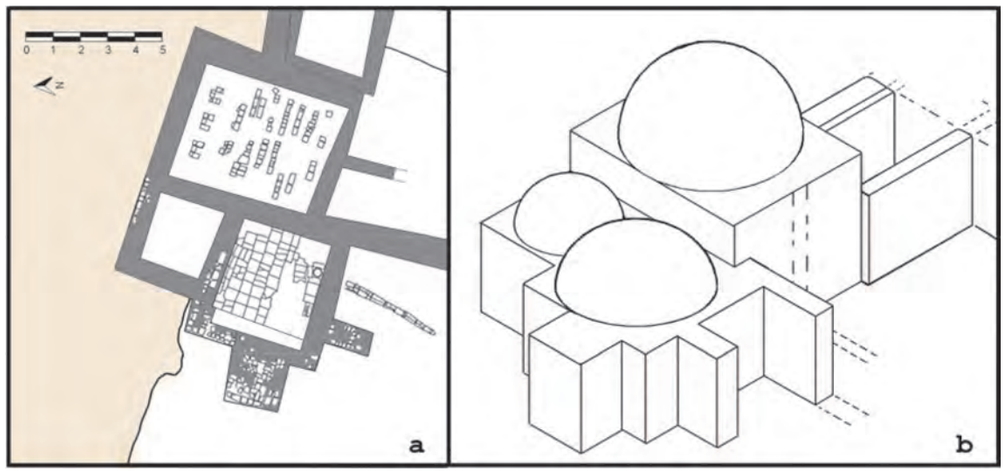

Fig. 4. Diagrams of the bath house (hamam) as excavated in 2018 within the shahristan at Ucharal-Ilibalyk: a. ground plan (after A. Seralyev and S. Syzdykov, Archaeological Expertise, LLP); b. preliminary schematic reconstruction by C.A. Stewart)

[5] Later these features became translated into Turkish terms, respectively: *cemekân, sıcaklık/hararet, ılıklık,* and *soğuklu.*

centuries; however, the complex may have been built earlier since our excavations stopped at the floor level. In terms of world history, this is the easternmost Roman-style bath complex ever excavated. Other investigations around the bath revealed additional information; so for example, a section was cut into the shahristan's ramparts, which uncovered a jewelry horde containing luxury imported items, including a necklace of turquoise and ocean coral (Fig. 5). The width of the city walls were eight meters thick in some areas, indicating that the ramparts rose up to a height of at least 10 meters.[6]

Fig. 5. Excavated remains of the Shahristan ramparts at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: Archaeological Expertise, LLP)

Excavations of the northern rabad produced more modest results. An area measuring 342.5 m^2 was examined. Here many rubbish pits were uncovered filled with butchered animal bone and broken ceramics, including courseware and fine glazed pottery, dating between the 12th and 14th centuries. Most of the mud-brick walls had eroded and dissolved so it was difficult to distinguish the soil from the brick (since the brick was created from the local soil). Though the architectural ground plan remains uncertain, we were still able to conclude that this was part of a residential complex according to the artifacts found therein.

In the west rabad, where the *Petros Kairak* was discovered, our team conducted a series of studies and excavations. In terms of topography, the west rabad was separated from the north rabad and shahristan by a large stream, known locally as the "Black River" (Karasu), which formed a fertile floodplain; a dense forest flanked the stream, thinning out into a flat shrubland (Fig. 2). Today the area consists of formerly cultivated fields – specifically for melon growing and fruit-tree orchards. Earlier, the entire area had been part of a Soviet-era collective farm, when machine-plowing was introduced to the region in the 1930s and this had a significant impact on the archaeological terrain; more recently, this area was designated as a state-owned forest, leading to organized tree-planting and natural reclamation. This dense

[6] Voyakin et al. 2016; Voyakin et. al. 2017; and Baipakov and Kamaldinov 2018, pp. 16–17.

vegetation hampered our reconnaissance efforts, particularly, the use of drones to identify crop marks and artifices; likewise, we had planned to use our GPR scans (across a 2000 m^2 area) to assist us in identifying the then-hypothetical cemetery and its limits. We soon learned that GPR was ineffective in locating burials under this type of vegetation and soil, as well as mud brick structures made with similar soil. Eventually we reverted to more traditional techniques, such as excavating test trenches (1×2 m) and field surveying. One trench revealed a floor or courtyard of a mud-brick structure, associated with a large midden consisting of butchered bone and broken ceramics, indicating a date range between the 12th and 14th centuries.

Our intensive surface-reconnaissance of the entire northern half of the western rabad produced further results. Covering about 40 hectares, team members followed transects laid out at 5-meter intervals on a bearing 90 degrees from the north-south Zokenbaeva Road, which leads into the village, perpendicular to the east-west A353 highway; along each transect, they examined every visible stone larger than 10 cm lying on the surface, and these were then lifted, and removed from the soil if they extended below the surface. This led to the discovery of seven additional kairaks with engraved crosses, two of these had inscriptions – one in Syriac, the other in Old Turkic with Syriac letters. The location of these were plotted on our site plan, testifying to a cemetery in the vicinity (Voyakin et al. 2016).

In the summer of 2017, our research continued to examine the western rabad where the kairaks were discovered the previous year. These were clustered in three places, but far from where it was first believed that the *Petros Kairak* was found – approximately 100 meters to the northeast. These areas, measuring 6000 m^2, were analyzed systematically; first, we examined the surface of the ground gathering and recording surface artifacts; second the vegetation was mechanically stripped (while preserving the trees); third, the surface was scanned with GPR; and fourth, locations with anomalous features were excavated. It was hoped that the geophysical data from the survey would allow the team to distinguish hard-soil from soft-soil areas to a depth of 80 cm below the stripped surface. The field team postulated that any medieval grave shafts would have reached that depth and be filled with relatively soft infilling down through the soil column; however, at this point, no excavation of medieval Christian graves in Kazakhstan had been known or published, and so our team was open to other possibilities.

The Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* kairaks resembled those found in Kyrgyzstan, which were associated with relatively straight-sided pit shafts or mausolea (Pantusov 1887, p. 62–63; Kyzlasov 1959; Zhukova 1994). The Tandy excavation team hypothesized that those Kyrgyzstan examples could provide a corresponding model for identification of the burials shafts after the vegetation was removed. We assumed that such burials at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* could also be identified by GPR scanning, and that by stripping the layer of vegetation the scans would be more successful than the previous year. It was not. We did not identify any graves during the 2017 season; instead, we uncovered six additional inscribed kairaks – one with a clear Old Turkic inscription, written with the Syriac alphabet. Four of these kairaks were excavated

below the plow zone – perhaps, still lying in situ. We also partially excavated 13th century structures nearby, such as the remains of a residence and a fire-brick furnace, which was used for metalsmithing and glassmaking, according to the type of slag found in the vicinity (Voyakin et al. 2016).

During our 2018-excavation season we continued to explore the areas where those kairaks were uncovered the previous year. Since neither surface clearing nor GPR provided clarity as to the exact location of potential graves, the 2018 plan simply involved digging deeper. Mechanical means were once again employed to remove the infilling of the previous year. Almost immediately, at levels some 10 to 40 cm below the previous excavations (or approximately 90 to 120 cm below the original ground surface), human remains were uncovered in the northern sector of Area C, measuring a total surface area of 1400 m^2. Due to these immediate finds, only about half of the previous year's surface in Area C was exposed.

Investigations of the Christian Cemetery in Ucharal-Ilibalyk

The 2018 expedition excavated a total of 33 graves, all but two contained children or infants (Fig. 6). An additional eight kairaks with cross inscriptions were found at this time. Also, we uncovered four fired bricks in situ with crude cross incisions within the graveyard, which may have marked infant graves, such as stillborns, since these were found in the same general locality. Only two adult graves were discovered, but one had a mudbrick vault. At this point, it was the only excavated grave that had an identifiable structure.

Fig. 6. Excavation of juvenile grave (2018) with closeup of small river stone placed at elbow at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: L. Flowers)

Even with the high number of juvenile graves, which by nature were rather small and poorly preserved, we were able to extract valuable information. All these burials were designed as simple pits and had a west-to-east orientation, meaning that the heads were placed at the west and the feet to the east (Fig. 7). Heads of the children were almost universally propped up on a soil "pillow" with their visage facing eastward and, in some instances, northeast. Heads and body placement may have been positioned to reflect the sun's azimuth position, that is, the geographical point where an observer sees the sun "rising" from the horizon, which shifts

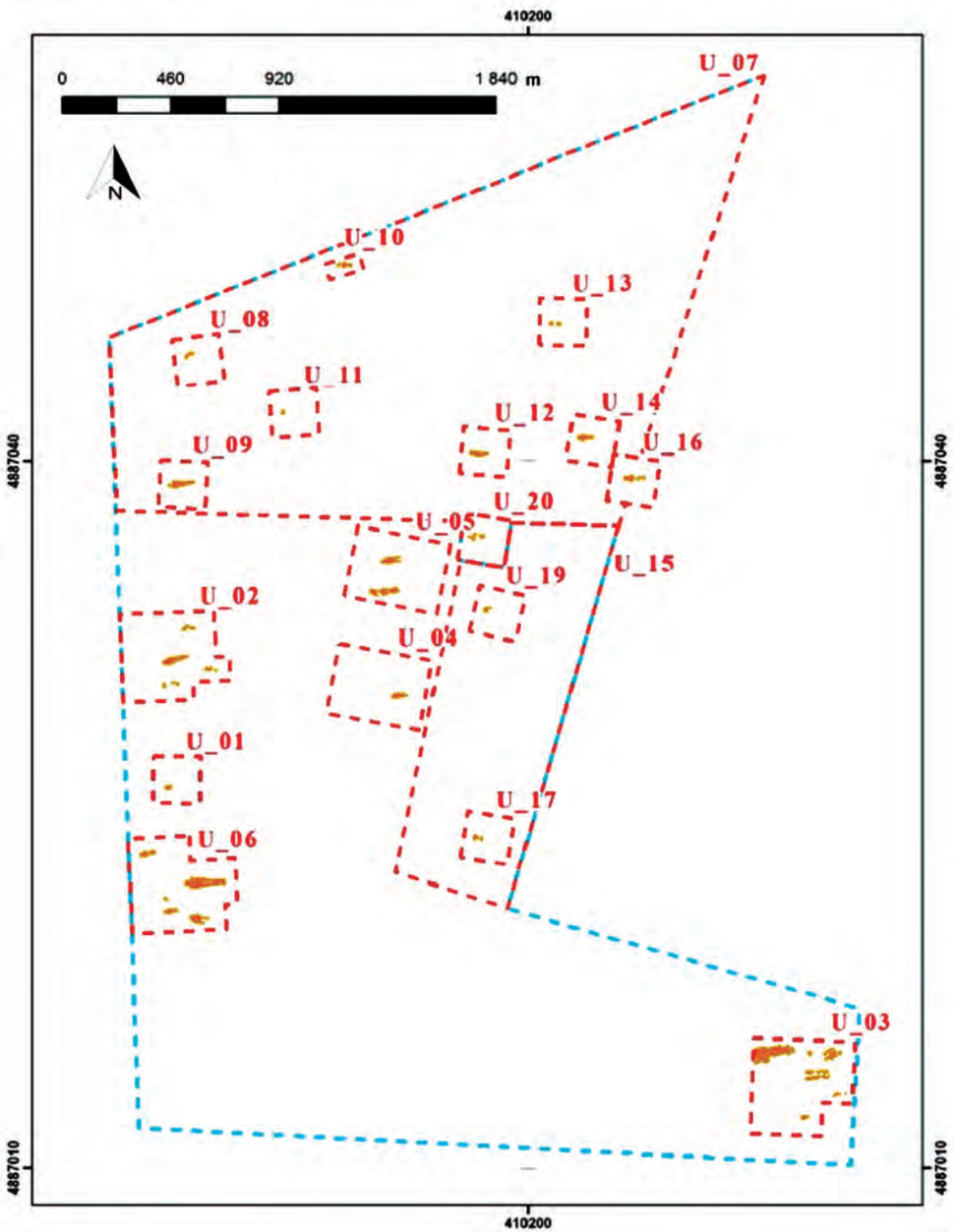

Fig. 7. Plan of the Cemetery as excavated in 2018 at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (D. Sorokin, Archaeological Expertise, LLP)

depending on the season. All juveniles, except two, had their lower arms bent at a 45-degree angle with their hands clasped together, just placed above their waist (Fig. 8).

Most of these graves did not contain any artifacts apart from a few ceramic shards and animal bones which were part of the soil fill. There were a few graves that contained accessories, including small micro-sized glass-paste beads, as parts of necklaces and/or bracelets or, in some cases, perhaps sewn onto clothing. One child had a very intricate turquois-bead-and-bird-bone necklace. Another child of perhaps five years of age had a silver ring with a raised, uninscribed bezel. Other tombs contained bronze or copper earrings. In several examples, smooth river stones ranging in size between five and 10 cm were placed either in the hand or at one or both elbows (Fig. 8). In addition, some of the graves were accompanied by ash pits containing animal bones (mostly sheep or goat) and courseware sherds. We theorize that this indicates some form of communal meal accompanied the funerary rites.

Exploration of the cemetery continued during the 2019-expedition season. As our excavation moved northwards, we began to uncover more adult graves. These provided us a better opportunity to examine the stages of burial construction and, where possible, discern the relationship between the graves both spatially and temporarily; in other words, differences in grave construction could indicate chronological phasing. Once again, we looked to the similar burials in Kyrgyzstan, as recorded by Nicholai Pantusov; he observed that children's graves rested on average 0.70 to 1.15 m below the surface, whereas adult graves were deeper at 1.6 to 2 meters below the surface (Pantusov 1886). So, again, it seemed plausible that by digging deeper, we might locate older burials, and if so, this would allow us to plot a relative chronology, charting how the cemetery developed over time.

Returning to the same location as the previous season, we began removing the soil in 10 cm intervals in the northern sector of Area C. Following an overnight rain shower, the soil then clearly revealed grave shafts, often accompanied by mudbrick, which became more discernable in wet soil. This led to the Archaeological Expertise team to develop a new technique using a sprayer to gently mist a thin layer of soil to assist in detecting differences in soil density. Eventually, 45 more graves were excavated, but well over 100 more still remain just within the

Fig. 8. Detail of grave (shown above in figure Fig. 4). Excavation of juvenile grave (2018) with closeup of small river stone placed at elbow at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: L. Flowers)

northern half of Area C, a section measuring 40×30 m (north-south to east-west). Of the 45 graves excavated, 31 were adults. Again, all graves had the same west-to-east orientation. However, adult graves appeared to be buried with less stringent ritualistic placement of head and hands – or, alternatively, their body position had shifted over time more so than the infant burials. While many heads were propped up, not all had their faces looking eastward. Hands were placed in various positions across the chest or abdomen. Children's graves continued to exhibit the same characteristics as found during the previous season, and it was confirmed that most of the juveniles were buried at shallower depths than adults, averaging 30 cm deeper.

Grave goods, particularly among the adults, were uncommon. While some 22% of juvenile graves contained beads or some small token of jewelry, only 9% of the adults had any adornment. Small river stones continued to be found either in the hands or at the elbows amongst the adult burials. With that said, there was an the exceptional burial of a middle-aged female who was buried with several items: two silver bracelets, two beaded bracelets that contained ocean coral fragments along with semi-precious stones, four rings (including a large gold ring with a turquoise stone), and a set of freshwater pearl earrings (Fig. 9). The two silver bracelets and two silver rings are significant not only for their value, since they designated an individual of elite status, but also for their iconography. These accessories are inscribed with a four-leaf almond rosette forming a Bolnisi-type cross. Another ring also contained a cruciform-shaped rosette. Given the local association with Christian kairaks, these designs are considered likely Christian-identity markers (Fig. 10). Similar motifs utilizing a rosette with a cross can be found in various Christian settings from the 3rd to 14th centuries along the entire length of the Silk Road and beyond, that is, spanning from Portugal to China (which will be further discussed below).

Another artifact of note is a copper alloy cross (5×5 cm) found in the context of the cemetery (Fig. 11). It is likely that this cross was either part of a priest's vestment or, more likely, an ornament for a coffin due to the eyelets found at the end of each crossbar, into which nails could be used to attach it to either wood or mudbrick. Crosses have been found in

Fig. 9. Locus 089 Adult Female remains with jewelry at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: S. Dulle)

Fig. 10. Jewelry, two silver bracelets with matching silver ring displaying four-leaf rosette along with ring with cruciform-shaped rosette indicating possible Christian iconography along with gold ring with turquoise stone from Locus 089 (Photo: S. Gilbert)

burials at other Central Asian contexts, such as Durmen (Uzbekistan) in which a gold cross was apparently sewn onto the clothing of the interred; wood coffins with metal crosses have also been found in medieval cemeteries found within the modern boundaries of Hungary (Shishkina 1994, p. 60; Tóth 2016, 105). The Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* metal cross provides another piece of evidence regarding the overall Christian identity of the medieval community.

All the burials we have uncovered are classified as inhumation pit burials. By definition, pit burials are vertical shafts were dug into the soil and bodies were deposited within and eventually covered with soil. There were four main variations of this type identified so far (Fig. 12). The first type can be classified as a simple pit with no associated grave construction. Most of these were found at the uppermost levels, just below the topsoil in 2018, particularly connected with juvenile interments, although some children were also found in other types.

The second type, and the most common, were tombs with brick vaulting. In a few cases, fired brick was utilized, but the majority were mudbrick; their sizes varied, on average measuring 25×25×8 cm

Fig. 11. Copper alloy cross (5×5 cm) found in cemetery with eyelets possibly used to attach to a wood lid for a burial (or coffin) at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: S. Gilbert)

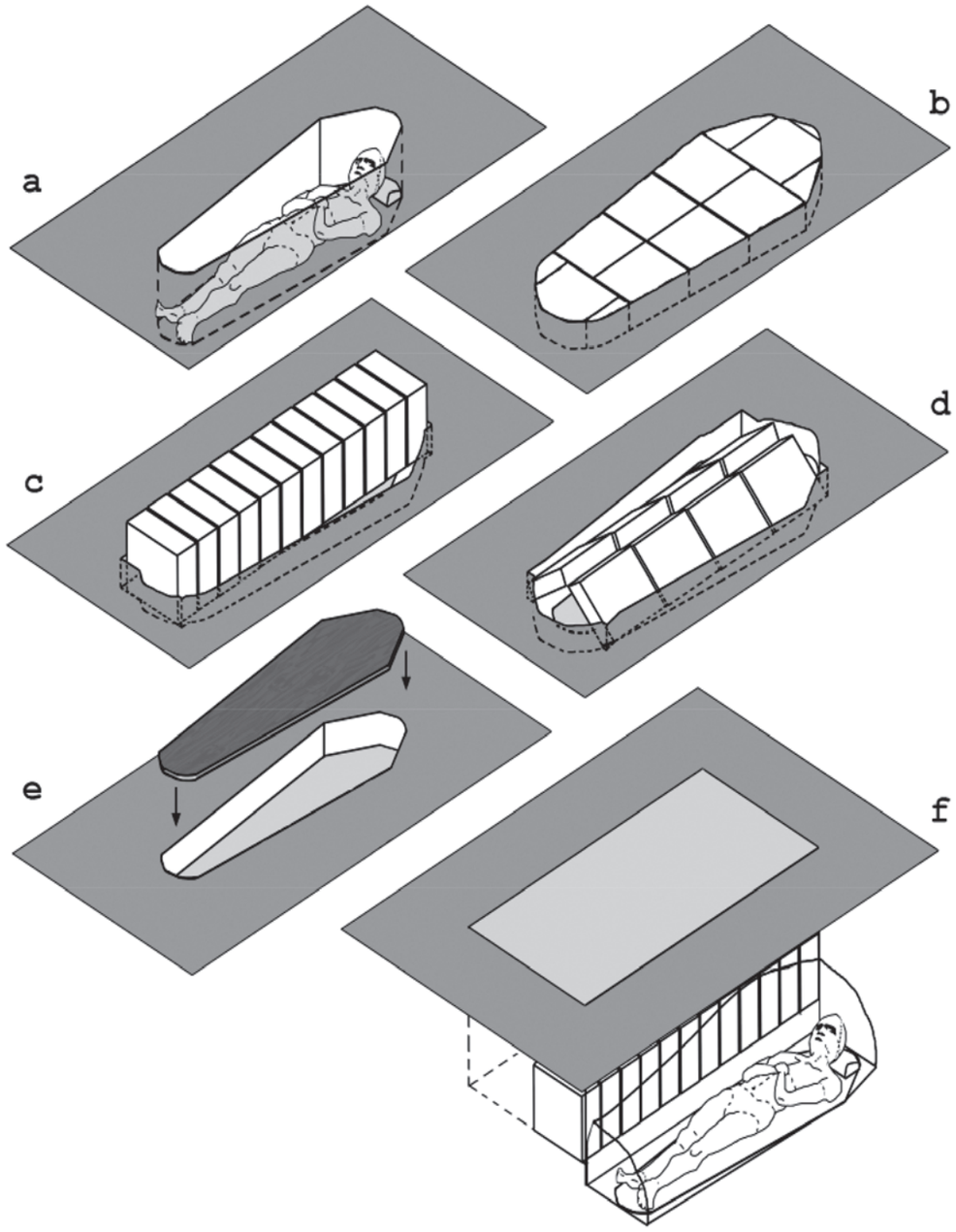

Fig. 12. Burial construction typology uncovered, so far, at Ucharal-Ilibalyk: a. Type 1 - Simple Pit; b. Type 2a – Brick-Covered Pit (header courses); c. Type 2b - Brick-Covered Pit (sailor courses); d. Type 2c – Brick-Covered Pit (gable courses); e. Type 3 – Wood-Plank-Covered Pit; f. Type 4 – Niche Burial (C. A. Stewart)

(Figs. 12.b-d). This type of burial had three subcategories based on the manner that the bricks were laid: (1) a header course, in which the widest faces were horizontal and rested flat on the ground (i. e.); (2) a sailor course, in which the bricks were vertically positioned, with their stretchers resting on the ground; and (3) a gable formation, in which two rows of bricks were positioned diagonally resting on each other forming a pitched roof. In each of these subcategories, a narrow shaft was dug first, and later ledges were carved around the perimeter upon which the bricks rested. Since the bricks stayed in place rather than falling into the pit, we assume that the bricks were positioned after the grave was filled with soil; eventually the infill and the mudbricks bonded. The fired bricks were spoilia taken from other constructions prior to being placed above the graves, evidenced by traces of mortar and stucco on their surfaces.

The third and fourth types of burials were less common. For example, we only found one example of the third type, in which a simple pit was covered with a wood lid (Fig. 12.e). In other words, this was not a coffin but, rather, a wide timber plank was placed over the body prior to being covered with soil. No nails or metal fasteners were found. We also have two instances of the fourth type, which we call "niche burials," where a vertical shaft was cut in the earth and then, in the side of the north section (that is, the wall of the shaft), a niche was carved forming a chamber, where the body was deposited (Fig. 12.f). The only apparent advantage to this type – which required much more effort than the others – was the ability to leave the chamber empty of soil, that is, unfilled so that the body was not covered in soil during the interment. The niche was then blocked off by a wall of mudbricks laid in one sailor course, thus sealing the body, and finally, the shaft was filled with soil.

Thus far all the graves at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* correspond with known types, identified as Christian, found in the Chuy Valley (Kyrgyzstan) yet with subtle variations.[7] It is assumed that the Chuy cemeteries spanned a seven-hundred-year period from the eighth to fifteenth centuries; however, that chronology is based on relative dating rather than scientific measurements. So our research has tried to find more absolute dating methods, which would showcase differences in grave construction; this would reflect changes in style or fashion according particular periods. By analyzing the distribution pattern of grave types spatially, we can chart the development of the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* cemetery temporally. Given the diversity of languages and tribal identities in the region, each burial type may have reflected the deceased's cultural background or social status. Until the entire cemetery is completely uncovered, our team is refraining from drawing concrete conclusions, but we are investigating all possibilities as the archaeological record becomes clearer.

Obviously issues of chronology are crucial to any historical study. At our site, establishing precise dating has been important for several reasons, somewhat unique to our situation. First, relative dating methods, such as establishing phases based on stratigraphic layers,

[7] See the next chapter in this volume by V. Kolchenko on Kyrgyzstan (Figures 29, 32–34) which also describes the current debate regarding the Chuy Valley churches and cemetery chronology.

have been difficult to assess due to our shallow burial and building deposits, as well as recent agricultural activity and modern infrastructure (such as the installations of pipelines and powerlines) that have disturbed the soil. Second, medieval mudbrick was made from the same material as the local soil; thus, in a fertile valley with a temperate climate, vegetation easily grows on and dissolves mudbrick, challenging stratigraphic analysis. Third, medieval archaeology in the region is evolving; for example, we still do not have a broad consensus on typologies linked to date ranges, whether ceramics, masonry techniques, or burials customs. Different regions in Central Asia have separate typologies often reflected by modern national boundaries; eventually, as medieval archaeology continues to progress towards a wider global perspective, there will be modifications to regional-specific methods and interpretations. Because we also have the benefit of primary sources describing the area, it is possible to associate recorded events and historical persons with physical phenomenon we find archaeologically; however, that imposes a further need to establish absolute chronological parameters.

Whenever possible we have extracted carbon samples for radiocarbon (C-14) analysis. During the 2016 season we obtained a large ash sample from the southwest corner of a house (in the north rebad), which resulted in a date range between 1218 to 1270 according to the measurements taken at the Centre for Applied Isotope Studies of the University of Georgia (USA); this date corresponded with the forms of ceramics found in the vicinity as well as the numismatic evidence (Voyakin et al. 2016, p. 244). In 2019 we took three carbon samples from graves at two different areas of the cemetery and sent them to the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory at the University of Arizona (USA) which analyzed their composition and provided the following chronology. The first sample was obtained from the southeastern corner of the cemetery; it was a piece of burnt wood from an ashpit, lying directly above a grave with a mudbrick vault laid out as a sailor course (Type 2.b as described above) and the individual within the grave was an adult. The date range for this first sample was 1164–1264 indicating the grave underneath was either earlier or contemporary with the sample. The second sample came from a simple pit burial (Type 1) in the same area as the first, but 6 meters to the west and at a higher level (70 cm); this second sample was a piece of burnt wood that was deposited within an infant's grave. The date range for this second sample was somewhat later, between the years 1278 and 1392. The third sample was obtained approximately 32 meters to the north of the second sample. It was found within an adult grave just above the rib cage on the left side, consisting of small pieces of carbonized wood; the entire tomb was covered in horizontally placed mudbricks (Type 2.a). The range for this third sample, dating between the years 1281 and 1389, is considered contemporary with the second sample.

At this point only general considerations can be made regarding the interpretation and significance of these carbon dates. Because their temporal ranges overlap, there can be a variety of hypotheses that are equally viable. For example, it is possible to interpret

Type 2.b (sailor-course vaulting) as predating Type 2.a (stretcher-course vaulting) by as much as 60 to 100 years. In contrast, we can dismiss that interpretation because both types appear side by side at the same elevation, which usually indicates synchronous practice. Moreover, the carbon dates only indicate the time when the organism died that provided the sample, not the associated grave itself. The human use of timber can last for a long time – that is, the date when wood was harvested and the date it was used as fuel can span brief or long durations. That is why we have yet to adopt any single hypothesis, waiting for further evidence and additional carbon dating.

There is some preliminary evidence that the cemetery developed in phases. While the graves are all oriented in the west-east direction, there are only a few discernable north-south rows; in other words, the cemetery appears to have grown organically from an original area and spread outwards in clusters rather than as a preconceived organized plan or grid system (Fig. 7). This explains why some graves are just a few centimeters from each other, while there were gaps of several meters between others. Kairaks, mudbrick vaults, and mounds served the practical purpose of marking graves to prevent accidental recutting by later burials; nevertheless, we do have examples where earlier burials were disturbed by later ones. At this point in our research, we cannot predict with certainty where the earliest graves will be found; however, the carbon dating and concentration of burials in the eastern and southern areas of the excavation so far indicates that, as our work progresses in these directions, the path towards an epicenter will become clearer.

With that said, these date ranges provide certainty regarding the wider historical context in four ways. First, it confirms the conclusions drawn by the numismatic study described above. Second, these dates situate the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* cemetery within the same period as the Chuy Valley cemeteries allowing for a direct cross-cultural comparative analysis. In other words, excavations that are ongoing in northern Kyrgyzstan may shed light on the material culture we find in eastern Kazakhstan and western China, and vice-versa – these specific burial customs were a wide-ranging phenomenon transcending modern boundaries. Third, in terms of political history, these cemeteries were developing during the height of the Chagatai Khanate of the Mongolian empire – that is, between the years 1262 and 1363 – when the city of Almalyk rose to power becoming a major capital city. Almalyk is located 52 km (33 miles) due east of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* – the relationship between the two cities are explained further below. Fourth, the carbon date ranges also have forced our team to consider the possibility of increased interments due to the global phenomenon known as the Black Death.

Scholars have theorized that Second Bubonic Plague may have begun in Central Asia during the 1330s and eventually devastated Europe by the 1340s. At the turn of the 20th century, Daniel Chwolson's investigation (i.e. of the 568 kairaks discovered in the Chuy River valley of Kyrgyzstan) noted that the inscriptions mention 106 people who died between the years 1338 and 1339 (1890, pp. 28, 81, 84; 1897, pp. 31–40; Dickens

2009b, p. 24). Ten inscriptions in the corpus – which appear to belong to the same date because they have similar epigraphy and style – specifically mention "pestilence," which he interpreted as the Bubonic plague (Slavin 2019). If so, these Christian inscriptions are the earliest historical records of this second plague. Chwolson mentioned that most of the names inscribed were Turkic, but other ethnicities were mentioned like Chinese, Persian, and Indian; eight people recorded on the kairaks were from Almalyk. As Gino Fornaciari has recently argued in his investigations of the plague in Europe, mass graves were not necessarily the only indicator of plague burials; there may be other archaeological indicators that may signal plague victims (2017, p. 39). For example, at the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* cemetery, in one specific area (Unit 7 of Area C) the graves were dug with rather uniform spacing between each other and they form clear rows – as if, at least, ten people died at the same time; and, in one grave, there was a double burial of a presumed mother and her small child (aged 2 to 3 years), indicating their deaths took place synchronously (Fig. 13). Ultimately, DNA analysis has the potential to allow us to determine if those buried in this location were affected by the plague; our team has carefully extracted tooth samples that are currently being analyzed for nutrition, age, and possible pathogens.

Our descriptions of the Christian cemetery and its burials – as described here – are preliminary and subject to change as our excavation continues. Clearly mortuary customs of these Mongol, Turkic, and other ethnic Christians were somewhat uniform and widespread along the Ili, Chuy, and Syr-Daria River Valleys. According to historical accounts and archaeology, this population was partly cosmopolitan (settled) and partly mobile (nomadic). Individuals had idiosyncratic tribal and local customs, which were grafted into an ever-evolving metaculture – that is, eastern Christianity. Analyzing the complex relationship between local customs and global practices will continually be assessed in our future research at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*.

Fig. 13. Grave with an assumed mother and child (Locus 090) at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: C. A. Stewart)

Summary Analysis of the Kairak Inscriptions

A total of 34 gravestones (kairaks) have been found to date (2019) in and around the area of the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* cemetery. As mentioned above, these new kairaks are not considered the first discovery of their kind in the Semirechye-Zhetysu region, but rather they occupy an important "in between" space – filling the gap, as it were – between the kairaks found in the Chuy Valley (Kyrgyzstan) first identified in 1885 and those discovered at Almalyk (China) identified in 1902. Because the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* kairaks are also located within a cemetery that can be excavated with modern archaeological techniques and methods, they can allow us to better understand medieval Christians in the region in general, regarding ethnicity, social status, funerary rituals, diet and nutrition, and other demographic information. Broadly speaking, these kairaks testify that Christianity's spread beyond the major urban centers into rural settlements. As such, our excavation has added crucial new evidence, confirming the historical record as chronicled by western travelers, such as William of Rubruck and Marco Polo in the 13th and 14th centuries, while expanding our knowledge of the ethnic diversity that characterized local communities forming the Church of the East as a whole (Jackson and Morgan 2009, pp. 51–55; Wilmshurst 2000).

The discovery of four kairaks at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* with written inscriptions is, obviously, significant for several reasons. First, these monuments allow the individuals buried here to "speak" to us today in a manner that their community found meaningful and they can self-identify themselves. Second, though these epitaphs are brief, they provide information regarding their language and education, which are inextricably linked to ethnicity, culture, social values, and both individual and communal identity. For example, three of the four stones are written in the Old Turkic language using the Syriac alphabet. While only a small sample, this higher percentage of gravestones utilizing Turkic rather than the Syriac (the Church's liturgical language) may indicate an important distinction between Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* community and those Christians living in the Chuy Valley; and yet, naturally, it signifies a stronger relationship with the community at nearby Almalyk, which also had a higher percentage of Turkic inscriptions. Transcribing and translating the inscriptions on the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* kairaks has been a challenging task due to the quality and style of the inscriptions. A thorough analysis and translation of the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* inscriptions has been carried out by Dr. Mark Dickens of the University of Alberta.[8] The following description and translation provides a cursory overview and interpretation based on Dr. Dicken's analysis.[9]

[8] The full analysis by Dr. Mark Dickens will appear in D. Voyakin et al. *Christianity on the Silk Road: Recent Excavations at Ilibalyk* (Oxford, forthcoming 2021).

[9] Examples of Christian graves steles in China are numerous, for example the Xi'an Stele, dated to the year 781, and the *Katarina Vilion Tombstone* dated to the year 1342 (Vermander 1998, pp. 35–55; Rouleau 1954, pp. 346–65). We consider the form and design of the *Petros Kairak* as a variation of the local Semirechye-Zhetysu tradition, and that is why we prefer to call it a "kairak" rather than a "stele."

The Petros Kairak is one of the largest Christian memorial stones found in Central Asia, measuring about one meter in length. Photographs and archaeological drawings of this stone were first published by Karl Baipakov and Pavel Petrov, and later featured in Christoph Baumer's book *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (Baipakov and Petrov 2015, pp. 80–87; Baumer 2016, p. 286) (*see* Chapter 1 above, Fig. 20, above). This kairak measures (at its widest points) 17×28×95 cm and consists of an igneous stone common in the Ili Valley, originally formed through orogenic processes that created the Tien Shan and Dzunagaria mountain ranges. Its design as an irregular-rounded prism was, for the most part, shaped by natural processes, while its widest surface areas (i.e. the front and back) were artificially sanded down to form flat surfaces. Its two crosses were carved first, but on two different sides – one on the "face" and another at the "top;" then the inscription was carved to fit between the cross and its edges, leaving a thin margin. Because it has a homogenous color and its surface has weathered uniformly throughout, it seems to have been lying flat for most of its existence, perhaps facedown preserving the inscription. If it was intended to lie horizontally, then it should be considered a typical kairak. Alternatively, it may have originally been expected to stand upright, given the orientation of the cross and the inscription, as well as the secondary cross on the top, which was meant to be viewed from above; if so, then it can also be considered a *stele*.

According to Dr. Dickens, the *Petros Kairak* is in the Old Turkic language and inscribed using the Syriac alphabet. An English translation can be interpreted as:

Baršabbā Quča's son,
Tiles'[Tegiz's] son,
Petros the priest.
It is the year of the monkey.

This inscription commemorates three generations – the deceased (Petros), his father (Tegiz), and his grandfather (Baršabbā Quča). The names in this family are a fascinating mix of biblical and Turkic namesakes, with historical connections to the Church of the East. The Greek name, *Petros*, is a common first name referring to Jesus Christ's close apostle, Peter. In this case, Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*'s Petros served as priest and assumed to be a leader in the local community, similar to a *mukhtar* (Arabic) or *azalar* (Turkic). In this case, according to Dickens, this particular word is the most common word for priest (*qaš*), and the most common ecclesiastical title found on the Semirechye-Zhetysu gravestones, and can be contrasted with the far less common term for priest (*kāhnā*), which is actually found on another inscription – the *Yošmid Kairak* – described below.

The names of Petros' father and grandfather are interesting. His father had a Turkic name which can be read as either *Teles* (a possible variant of *Tileš*, meaning "wished for") or *Tegiz* (meaning "smooth"). The reason for the variety of options in translation is due to the

fact that engravers often made spelling errors, possibly indicative of their level of literacy, or miscommunication between the scribe (carver) and the patron. The dual name, *Baršabbā Quča* is a composite Syriac-Semitic name – *Baršabbā* meaning "Son of the Sabbath" combined with *Quča*, a Turkic word meaning here either "sheep/ram" or "strength." This man was a rather significant member of the community as his own gravestone was also discovered, as discussed further below. The name *Baršabbā* contains a significant link to the Church of the East's history, and specifically, that of Central Asia. One Baršabbā (later designated with the title of "Mar" or "saint") was a fourth-century missionary. The *Chronicle of Seert* (II.40) mentions that in the year 363 Mar Baršabbā had healed and baptized Shirahan, wife of Shah Shapur II of the Persian Sassanid dynasty, and this resulted in both her and the bishop being exiled to Merv (a major city of antiquity now located in modern Turkmenistan). There is another account of Mar Baršabbā (which may be the same person or someone else), found in a fragmented manuscript from the Turfan oasis, indicating that he was responsible for spreading the Christian faith eastward to the city of Balkh (Afghanistan) and throughout Central Asia (Gilman and Klimkeit 1999, pp. 210–211). The name was popular among the community over the centuries, frequently recorded in the Syriac manuscripts, on the Chuy Valley kairaks, and other inscriptions, such as the graffito inscribed on a cliff face in Urgut (Uzbekistan) (Sims-Williams 1988; Hunter and Dickens 2014, p. 470; Sims-Williams 2012, p. 232; Chabot 1906, p. 288; Zhumagulov 2014, p. 226). Therefore, we can add the *Petros Kairak* to the list of artifacts attesting to the importance of this name and the commemoration of the famous bishop of Merv through christening rituals; moreover, it signifies a global practice – so, while the tangible kairak form is a local Turkic custom, the intangible faith was rooted in global metanarratives communicated through language and ritual (Baumer 2016, p. 178).

The *Petros Kairak* has a date based on the eastern system of the 12-year animal cycle. This is the only gravestone from Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* that provides any sort of date. Unfortunately, this dating method, originating with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, does not provide a precise year such as many of the stones from Kyrgyzstan which utilized the Seleucid-Era dating system, which was common in medieval Syriac manuscripts. The *Petros Kairak* records that this priest died during the "Year of the Monkey," and according to the evidence (ceramics and C14 dating) within the cemetery and the larger historical context, this year was within a 12-year rotation that ranged between 1200 to 1368 – so we suggest, more specifically, the years 1296 or 1308.

The Shirin Kairak is unlike the other inscribed gravestones found at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* because it was written both in the Syriac script and expresses the Syriac language (Fig. 14). It was discovered during the 2016 excavations with a cluster of two other stones that lay due south of the current excavations in Area C. So far, its find-spot has not been associated with any particular grave. This greenish-black stone contains a rather more detailed image of the

Calvary Cross which incorporates almost the entire face of the 24×17×4.5 cm stone. Written in vertical fashion on the upper half of the stone is the simple inscription:

This is the grave [of] Shirin the Believer.

The name "Shirin" is of Persian origin, meaning "sweet" (and is still a popular female name in Central Asia and commonly understood meaning "juice" in modern Kazakh). Dr. Dickens points out that the particle *daleth* (ܕ), signifying the word "of" is missing at the beginning of the second line. This grammatical error may indicate a general misunderstanding of the Syriac language of this community or merely a scribal oversight.

The phrase "the believer" was a common designation for devout laypersons – as found on other stones of the Semirechye-Zhetysu corpus. In this particular case, however, the phrase "Shirin the Believer" may signify a more specific historical connection. "Shirin" had a special resonance among Christians, since the historical (and in literature, legendary) queen of the Sassanian Shah Khosrow II (r. 590–628) was named Shirin (Brock and Harvey 1987, pp. 177–182; Baum 2004; Baumer 2016).The Muslim historian al-Ṭabarī utilized the exact phrase of "Shirin the Believer" in identifying the Persian Queen. According to al-Ṭabarī's account, Yezdigerd III, the last Persian Shah prior to the Muslim conquest fled to Merv and was murdered there by a simple miller who coveted the king's golden belt. The local Christians discovered his body and provided him a dignified burial. The metropolitan claimed that it was only right to give the former shah a Christian burial since they remembered that his grandmother was "Shirin the Believer" (Humphries 1990, p. 89). As the male name *Baršabbā* was commemorated through christening and official feast days, so the female name *Shirin* received the same honor by the Christians of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*. Hagiographical accounts of "Shirin the Believer" would have traveled along the Silk Roads and down through the centuries, if not by written documentation, then oral tradition, inspiring Turkic or Mongol Christians here to name at least one of their children after this exemplar. Note also that one of Mongke Khan's daughters (born from one of his Christians wives) was named Shirin, according to William of Rubruck's account dated to the year 1254 (Jackson and Morgan 2012, p. 178). The name Shirin is also found on at least three other gravestones in the Semirechye-Zhetysu corpus. One of these is inscribed with "Shirin the Believer" and is now located in the Natural History Museum in Almaty and it was part of the collection that was found during the 19th century in Kyrgyzstan, but its exact provenance is unknown; it also provides a date of 1339 AD – perhaps, she was a plague victim (Zhumagulov 2014, pp. 102, 400, 447).

Fig. 14. The Shirin Kairak from Ucharal-Ilibalyk: a. Photo: S. Gilbert; b. 3-D laser scan; b. cross section (Archaeological Expertise, LLP)

The Yošmid Kairak is a gravestone inscribed in Syriac script, conveying a message in the Old Turkic language (Fig. 15). It is undated and appears to be the grave of two individuals, declaring:

The grave of Baršabbā Quč.
The grave of Yošmid the priest.

Its inscription is the clearest and most legible of all four of the inscribed stones discovered so far at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*, and its cross iconography is also based on the image of the True Cross. The stone is greenish-black measuring 30×27×16 cm. We assume that the stone was placed between two graves, since it differentiates two separate people; however, we cannot be sure since it was found displaced within the cemetery and unassociated with a specific burial. As mentioned above, we did find two bodies within one grave, but these consisted of an adult woman and a child, so this seems unlikely to have been the tomb marked by the *Yošmid Kairak*.

The name *Yoshmid* is rooted in the Sogdian term for "Sunday" (literally, "first day") and is, therefore, cognate with Persian *yakshanbe*, still used in much of Central Asia as the word for Sunday (e.g. Tajik Якшанбе; Uzbek *yakshanba*; Kazakh Жексенбі) (Zieme 2015, pp. 188–191). It parallels Christian traditions elsewhere, including within the Syriac language, where one finds the name *Bar Hadbshaba* meaning "Son of Sunday". In Dr. Dickens' analysis, he mentioned that the word for "priest" used here – *kāhnā* – is Syriac, but not the usual term used in this context which should be *qašišā* as found on the majority of gravestones from Semirechye-Zhetysu. Possibly these two words connote different types of clerical positions or, perhaps, indicate a shift in preferred titles signifying a chronological gap.

Note that the name "Baršabbā Quč(a)" is inscribed on both *Yošmid* and *Petros Kairak*. There are two possible ways to interpret this. First, this individual could be another person indicating that this was a popular double name. In many ancient and medieval societies patronyms were integral to nomenclature; that is, sons were often known by their father's name, forming "double names," often designated by a prefix or suffix, such as "bar" (Semitic), "– yevich/ovich" (Slavic), "mac/ap/o" (in Gaelic), "fitz" (Norman),

Fig. 15. The Yošmid Kairak from Ucharal-Ilibalyk that contain written inscriptions (Photo: S. Gilbert)

"sen/son" (Scandinavia), etc. Similarly, in medieval Arabic, Turkic, and Mongolian-speaking communities, often the son's second name is that of his father's, and this is still common today (for Kazaks, *see* Madieva and Tayeva 2014). Alternatively, the man mentioned on the *Petros Kairak* was actually buried beside Yošmid and this gravestone served to mark both burials, either because these graves were within one mausoleum or separate tombs were adjacent to each other.

The Ḥenanišo Kairak is a fragment of a dark-gray gravestone. Unfortunately, only one-quarter of the original stone remains (the lower right quadrant), the rest was possibly cut by a plow during the Soviet era (Fig. 16). The surviving text is in the Turkic language, but little can be deciphered with confidence. What is discernable has been translated as:

Lord […] Ḥenanišo, […], Marin […]

The first line is written vertically to the right of the cross, whereas lines 2–4 are written horizontally under the cross. The second line begins with either the title ܡܪܝ, *Mar*, the Syriac for "Lord" or "Saint" followed by the beginning of a name which could be read as *Ḥenanišo*, meaning "the mercy of Jesus," or alternatively, the phrase conveyed a benediction. If the latter was the case, then the name may have begun with the following syllable ܡܪܝܢ, *Marin*…. The next line contained a word with a Turkic genitive case ending "– *ning*" followed by a fragmented word starting with ܩ, /q/. It is hoped that the other fragment of the stone will eventually be uncovered as our excavation continues, allowing us to better understand this inscription.

Even with the limited information that these gravestones provide, they still shed much light concerning the community of Christians at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*. In terms of linguistics, the population clearly spoke the language of Old Turkic. A name such as *Petros*, shows a connection to the biblical text whereas both *Barshabba* and *Shirin* point to an understanding of specific historic persons that came into the region from western Asia. The Syriac inscription on the *Shirin Kairak* indicates that some members of the community also spoke this language. The local community learned of their Christian faith either through the spoken or written word that was

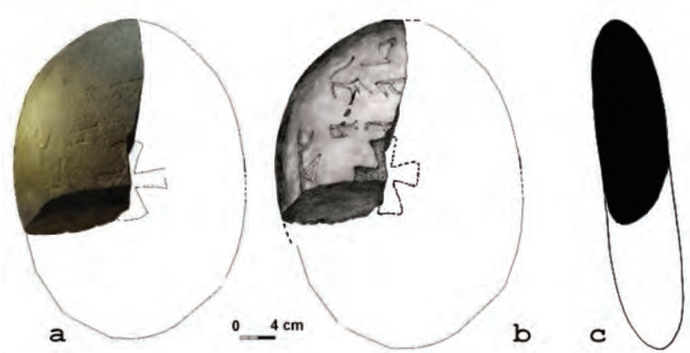

Fig. 16. The Ḥenanišo Kairak from Ucharal-Ilibalyk that contain written inscriptions a. Photograph with suggested reconstruction; b. 3-D laser scan; b. cross section (Archaeological Expertise, LLP)

taught in a formal manner – because, why else write on these stones unless there was an audience who could read the messages? Turkic names such as *Quč/Quča (Kush/Kucha)* and *Tiles/Tegiz* demonstrate that some members of the population were indigenous rather than immigrants. In terms of social stratification, both men and women were commemorated and at least two kairaks refer to the presence of clergy; Dr. Dickens has noticed that a high proportion of gravestones inscriptions throughout the Semirechye-Zhetysu corpus name priests (Dickens 2009b). In terms of chronology, we have at least three generations referred to on the inscriptions.

Christian Iconography

The discovery of kairaks at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* has prompted our project to reanalyze all the Eastern Church inscriptions and cross depictions located in Central Asia. This is a rather large data set: there are over 10 kairaks from Almalyk (China); 40 inscriptions found in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia; and over 630 inscriptions found in the Chuy Valley (Chwolson, 1890, 1897; Niu, 2006; Zhumagulov 2014; Borbone and Marsone 2015). The epigraphy and iconography can shed light on the relationship between the Chuy Valley and the Ili Valley cities as well as other, lesser known cemeteries, as at Issyk Kul, and the Emil and the Irtysh Valleys. Similarities between all known kairaks indicate a wide-ranging Christian culture that spanned the entire Semirechye-Zhetysu and, perhaps, beyond. Of particular note is the iconography referred to as the True Cross (also known as the 'Calvary' or 'Golgotha' Cross) which appears on approximately 25% of the gravestones discovered so far at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*. In addition, the 2019 season yielded silver bracelets and finger rings engraved with an almond-petal rosette (mandelrosette) with a Bolnisi cross in-between the petals – another type of Christian symbol.

There are eight different cross types inscribed on the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* kairaks. Most are simple lines or belong to the flared-cross type (*croix pattée*). The kairaks with the highest-quality carving include the True-Cross symbol (Fig. 17) This motif is uncommon in medieval Chinese contexts (except for some examples in Tibet); however, it was widespread in Sassanid Persia (modern Iran and Iraq) (Francke 1925; Ka'bi

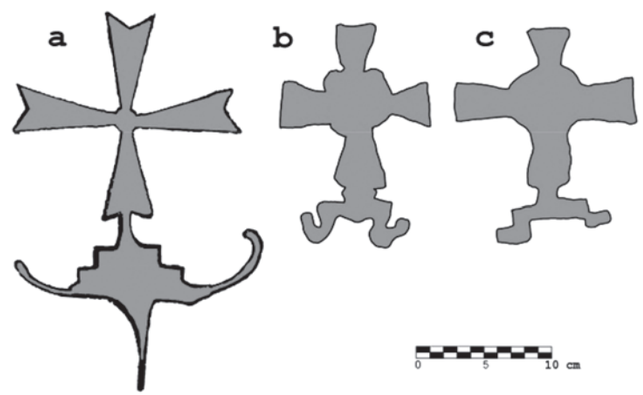

Fig. 17. Diagram illustrating the True Cross Reliquary (Calvary Cross) inscribed on the kairaks from at Ucharal-Ilibalyk: a. Petros Kairak; b. Shirin Kairak; c. uninscribed kairak, Inventory No. IB-16-3-1 (C.A. Stewart)

2014). Examples of the True-Cross image can also be found among the gravestone corpus of Kyrgyzstan and, in fact, quite a large number exist, depending upon how one interprets their form (Zhumaulov 2014). Apparently, the image held special significance for the Eastern Church – expressing a unique doctrine among all the other religions on the Silk Road.

The True-Cross type is associated with the Reliquary of the True Cross which was kept in Jerusalem at the church of the Holy Sepulcher. It was also associated with the hill of Golgotha, which is an Aramaic (and Syriac) term for *skull* from which the Latin toponym *Calvariae* ("Calvary" in English) was derived. In the 380s the pilgrim Egeria recorded how relics of the True Cross were venerated within the chapel built above the hill where Christ was crucified. She also mentioned how pilgrims would try to steal pieces of it (Wilkinson 1999). To prevent this, those relics were encased in a cross-shaped Reliquary, elevated on steps, and secured behind a niche. In the year 614 the Sassanid Persians had occupied Jerusalem and took the Reliquary to their capital at Ctesiphon – an event that, certainly, had great significance for the Church of the East, since that was the seat of their Patriarch. In addition, the *Chronicle of Seert* (XIV.272-3) recorded how Shah Khosrow II gave the Reliquary to his wife Shirin (who was mentioned above) for safekeeping. In 629 the return of the True Cross reliquary played a significant role in the peace negotiations between the Sassanids and Byzantines. The Byzantine Emperor Heraclius personally returned the Reliquary to Jerusalem (Baum 2004, pp. 54–56). Coins of Heraclius commemorated his victory over the Persians by depicting the Reliquary on his coins (Fig. 18a.) – note that several of these coins (and imitations of them) have been found in Turkic-Mongol tombs in Mongolia (Erdenebold 2017; Stark 2018, p. 352). The Reliquary of the True Cross remained in Jerusalem until Saladin invaded the city in 1187, and afterwards it disappeared from history. The earliest depictions of the Reliquary emphasize the base (steps) and the cross-shaped receptacle, but provide few details; fortunately, around the year 568, the Emperor Justin II made a copy of the Reliquary which he sent to the Pope John III – today this replica is known as the *Vatican Cross* (Fig. 18b.). The *Vatican Cross* was mostly unaltered over the centuries, providing some

Fig. 18. Representations of the Calvary Cross: a. Gold Solidus of the Emperor Heraclius, 630 AD, minted at Constantinople (4.49 gm); b. Crux Vaticana, ca. 568 AD, gold, precious stones, and wood

sense how the original Reliquary appeared during the Early Middle Ages; only one part was replaced – the original base was, most likely, a simple three-step design (Noga-Banai 2019, pp. 232–34).

Three specific characteristics of the True Cross Reliquary are referenced on the kairaks at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*. First, where the arms of the cross converge, it forms a circle – this signifies the area where the pieces of wood (i.e. the True Cross) were kept within the Reliquary. Second, the platform with "steps" that forms the base of the Reliquary – this symbolizes the holy city of Jerusalem, in general, and the hill of Golgotha, specifically. And, third, the arms of the cross are flared, or have expanding terminals (i.e. the *croix patee* type) – this is an abstracted form of the "flowering cross" (also referred to as the "Life-Giving Cross") motif and, in turn, serves as a metaphor of the "Tree of Life." There are regional varieties of this flowering cross motif found on contemporary14th-century tombstones: in far eastern Asia, as exhibited at the Quanzhou Maritime Museum in China; in western Asia, as the khachkars of Armenia; and in Central Asia, as mentioned above, on the Semirechye-Zhetysu kairak collection from Kyrgyzstan.

The depictions of the True Cross emphasized the importance of Jerusalem and the theology of the cross within the Eastern Church (Karim 2004). Therefore, there are three main hypotheses that could explain the emphasis of the motif on kairaks in Central Asia. The artist(s) may have been depicting images that they have seen in various sources, such as liturgical artworks (illuminated manuscripts, shrines, vestments, processional crosses, etc.) or the original True Cross Reliquary would have seen in Jerusalem. The Eastern Church maintained a presence in Jerusalem to assist such eastern pilgrims; for example, Benjamin of Tudela's *Itinerary* described Jerusalem in the year 1187 as "a small city full of Jacobites, Syrians, Greeks, Georgians, Franks…and Jews…"; here "Jacobites, Syrians" are conveying the entire Eastern Church. Around the year 1250, two notable pilgrims, Markos (the future Patriarch Yaballaha III) and Bar Sauma, traveled from Khanbalyk (Beijing) to Paris (France) – their journey was initially motivated by their desire to see the shrine of the True Cross in Jerusalem (Montgomery 1966, p. 32; Borbone 2000). According to their account, they avoided the Ili Valley because of the ongoing warfare among the Mongol khans, especially the conflict between Kublai of Khanbalyk and Kaidu of Almalyk. On one kairak from the Chuy River Valley an image of the True Cross is accompanied by a Syriac inscription that can be translated as "The living symbol [of] Jesus, our Savior" (Zhumagulov 2014, pp. 61, 161, 431) – a confession of their faith. Several documents were also discovered at a medieval monastery in Xinxiang (10 km north of Turfan, China) recounting the story of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine (Hopkirk 1980, p. 130; Hunter 2012).

Ili Valley and the Historical Sources

The discovery of a medieval Christian community in eastern Kazakhstan has forced our team of archaeologists to reconsider the documentary sources. What role did the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* settlement play in the wider historical context? Beginning in the 3rd century, Turkic-speaking tribes began migrating in a south-westward direction from the Altai Mountains and would occupy the Ili Valley. This movement may have caused the Saka-Wusun leadership to leave the Ili region and establish themselves in Kashgar and Khotan (Narain 1990, p. 173). The Saka-Wusun left behind would then be assimilated and ruled by a Turkic elite, known – according to Chinese sources – as the Ashina clan (Sinor and S. Klyashtorny 1996, pp. 328–29). The fertile and water-rich Ili Valley became *the* center where Turkic identity was first developed and, from there, their conquests spread further east, eventually the Turkic-language became a global tongue. For example, al-Kasghari (11th c.) described how the Turkic zodiac and calendar developed:

> Then he [the king of the Turks] went out hunting, and ordered that wild beasts be driven toward the valley of the Ili – that great river. So, they hunted beasts and drove them into the water. Twelve different animals crossed the river, and the King applied the name of each of them to classify different years (translated after Levi and Sela, 2009, pp. 72–73).

This tale reflects the importance of the Ili Valley in Turkic etiological myths, and how later Turks, like Kasghari, commemorated the geographical location, even when the names of their prehistoric kings were forgotten.

As Turkic-speaking tribes migrated westward, Christianity was moving eastward and eventually the two cultures would meet. According to the Roman apologist Arnobius writing in the year 303: "Virtuous deeds of Christians can be identified and evaluated within India, in China, Persia, and Media..." (*Adversus Nationes* II.12) – here "Media" (Medes) literally means "middle", i. e. "Central Asia." Likewise, Syriac sources describe Christianity taking root in the Kushan Empire by the fourth century and, subsequently, in the Hephthalite Empire (Mingana 1925; Litvinsky and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya 1996, p. 424). These communities would have contact with Turkic-speaking tribesmen by the mid-5th century, if not earlier. As Turkic-speaking tribes migrated westward, they interacted with Greek Christians. For example, by the year 463, Priscus of Panium (or Priskos Rhetor), described how an embassy of Turkic Oghurs, Onoghurs, and Saraghurs arrived in Constantinople and formed an alliance with the Byzantine Empire against the Persians. According to Peter Golden, these tribesmen were known collectively in Chinese sources as the *T'ieh-lê* and were displaced by another tribe known as the Sabirs – concentrated in the Tien Shan mountains and the Ili Valley; other scholars associate the Oghurs with the Uyghurs (1990, p. 257). In a domino-effect, it seems that as one tribe was displaced, another tribe was

forced to migrate: the Chinese defeated the Avars in 460: this caused the Avars to invade the Xiongnu (Huns, Hephthalite) domain; then the Turkic tribes, agitated by the Avars and Huns, were pushed westwards; eventually the Avars, Huns, and Bulgars ("mixed ones") marched across south-east Europe causing the so-called "Migration Period" in the Early Middle Ages (Golden,1990, 258; 1992a, 100–106). As Christians migrated eastward, Turkic tribesmen were moving west, and it was inevitable that the two groups would meet and assimilate.

After Christianity was officially adopted by the Roman Empire in 380, Christians living in Persia were often viewed suspiciously, as if they were Roman sympathizers (Wiesehöfer 1996, p. 202). Zoroastrians exploited this fear and influenced Sassanid rulers to persecute Christians (Payne 2015). Naturally, Christians living in Persia tried to disassociate themselves with the Roman Church and develop more culturally sensitive Persian forms of practice and identity, if not doctrine. The Council of Ephesus in the year 431 not only exposed the various views of Christology, but reflected diverging theological language between Syriac-speaking Christians and their Greek- and Roman-speaking counterparts. As a result, the deposed Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius (386–450), and eastern teachers, like Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428), found sympathizers in the great Christian school at Nisibis, where Syriac-speaking theologians were concentrated.

Eventually the harsh treatment of Nestorius would be used as a polemic regarding how the Greek-speaking authorities marginalized the Syriac-speaking community. Surviving documentation does not affirm whether the majority of Syriac-Christians had adopted the so-called "Nestorian heresy" – or if, indeed, the historical Nestorius himself would have accepted this heresy as it was later characterized (Mingana 1925; Brock 1996). As the Eastern Church grew and expanded throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, their sympathy with Nestorius allowed them – if only as a strategic measure – to distance themselves from the Byzantine Empire and minimize mistrust by their Persian overlords who were waging war with Constantinople. At times this strategy worked, allowing the Eastern Church to develop its own liturgical practices and artistic expressions independent of Byzantine authorities; at other times, their minority status left them vulnerable to persecution (Malek 2005; Baum and Winkler 2003). Perhaps this why the Eastern Church was not content to confine itself in the Persian Empire, but sent missionaries further afield.

The Eastern Church was never established as the official religion of any world empire. Nevertheless, wherever Christianity was tolerated, their congregations seemed to thrive. By the end of the 5th century, the Eastern Church was established in Chera Kingdom of southern India and, by the mid-7th century, the Tang Empire – and every state in between (Thapar 2004, pp. 277–279; Deeg 2006, pp. 115–132). The spread of Christianity is related to the establishment of road and sea routes (i.e. "Silk Roads") attached to emporia and commercial centers that facilitated travel for missionaries, merchants, and pilgrims. The Sassanid Persians would have controlled much of the commercial traffic in the southern Middle East between Bosra (Iraq) and Delhi (India) from 224 to 630. To the northeast, the

Persians would be complemented by the Sogdians, who were instrumental in facilitating trade in the southern Semirechye-Zhetysu, especially from their cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Navakent and Suyab. Unlike the Sassanid Persians – who sometimes embraced, and sometimes persecuted Christians – the Sogdians maintained a pluralistic culture, permitting the spread of Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, and Christianity throughout Central Asia (La Vaissière 2005).

Chinese historical sources described nomadic Turkic-speaking tribes inhabiting the north bank of the Ili Valley during the Tang dynasty (618–907). These tribes were labeled as such based on their language rather than their politics or ethnicity. Tang armies conquered these tribesmen and dominated the region in order to control the east-west trade routes; eventually the Chinese installed Turkic rulers as their allies extending their influence in the region. In the late eighth century, the Uyghurs conquered their Turkic overlords and ended Tang domination, forming their own empire; however, around the year 840 the Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz tribe rebelled and ended the Uyghur Empire's control of the Ili Valley. And yet, before then, another Turkic-speaking tribe emerged in 745, the Karluks, who controlled the western part of the Ili River; they filled the power vacuum when the Uyghur Empire later collapsed (Golden, 2011, p. 63). Sometime in the 780s a "Turkic king" requested an Eastern-Church bishop to be installed and, thus, a cathedral constructed, somewhere along the Syr Darya river valley; this khan, most likely, was a Karluk (Dickens 2010, pp. 127–128). According to the Persian writer Narshakhi, the later Karluk emir, Ismail, conquered the city of Taraz (Kazakhstan) in the year 893 and "A large church was transformed into a grand mosque" – it is possible that this was the same cathedral built in 780s, but we cannot sure (Frye 1954, p. 87)

The Karluks organized a confederacy of Turkish and Uyghur tribes along the Ili Valley, which would emerge as the Karakhanid Khanate by the end of the 9th century (Golden 1990, pp. 354–355) (Fig. 19). According to a much later source (16th c.): "In addition to these Uyghurs…living in the Eastern Tian Shan, there was a third section of the race dwelling farther west. They are called sometimes the 'Karlughi' [Karluks] and their seat of power was originally at Ilibalyk and on the head waters of the Chuy" [Mirza Muhammad Haidar (translation after Ross 1895, pp. 93–94)]. Although this description is confused – since it conflates two river systems – it reflected a historical reality; that is, the Karluks were concentrated between the Ili and Chuy Valleys. As such, this passage reflects the potential role that the site of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* can play in understanding the Karluks.

Gradually the Karluks assimilated other Turkic-speaking tribes, such as the Chigils and Tukshi. Eventually they then conquered the Sogdian-established cities of Suyab and Navekat, making the former their capital until they established Balasagun (Buruna) in the 10th century. Being Turkic, the Karluk elite of the Karakhanid Khanate inherited the royal titles of the previous Göktürks – khan – and assimilated Sogdian culture, which still flourished in the region. According to the Persian historian Juzjani (b. 1193), by the

Fig. 19. Map Illustrating the Karakhanid Khanate and Tribes ca. 1000 AD (C. A. Stewart)

year 1134 the Karluks had already founded the northern Semirechye-Zhetysu cities, such as Kayalyk and Almalyk (China); we can assume that these settlements were modelled on the flourishing southern cities of Suyab and Balasagun (Biran 2005, p. 106).

The Karakhanids dominated the entire Semirechye-Zhetysu region for over three centuries. Most likely an earlier settlement at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* was transformed by the Karluks who shaped it after the cities they had conquered in the Chuy Valley. As mentioned above, the numismatic studies at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* indicate an 11th century presence; moreover, some of the earliest identifiable ceramics discovered during excavations belong to the late 9th century, similar to styles found at Suyab and Navekat (Kyrgyzstan). Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*'s monumental architecture, such as the shahristan's ramparts and the bath house, would have signified Karakhanid civilization in the Ili Valley. At the moment, the only evidence of religion found here is Christianity, which was not expected.

Most publications that describe Karakhanid culture emphasize their Islamic identity. Coinage (dirhams) display their willingness to adapt Arabic script and institutions to showcase their rule; however, this is a superficial phenomenon, since they were mimicking the coinage of western Arabic powers with whom they traded (Kochnev 2006). It is difficult to assess whether their conversion to Islam, as attested in historical accounts, was more substantial. The Karluk elite ruled a hodgepodge assortment of city-states and nomadic tribes, with various religious roots and a diversity of languages (Golden 1990, p. 344). Surviving historical accounts were written by Muslim scholars many years after the fact; at times they exaggerated, on the one hand, the ease in which Islam was embraced by entire populations or, on the other hand, how Muslim leaders battled bitterly against non-adherents. These narratives seem contradictory. For example, Jamal Qarshi in the 13th century described how the first Karakhanid ruler to convert to Islam was Satuq Ughra Khan in 934; at the beginning, Satuq had to hide his conversion from his Karluk family, who were probably Buddhists;

by the end of the story, Satuq conquered Kashgar forcing *all* its citizens to convert (Levi and Sela 2009, pp. 73–76). Marco Polo's testimony casts doubt on this account when he described Kashgar in the 13th century as having "many" Christians, and that they worshiped publicly in monumental churches (I.33). Another testimony is Ibn al-Athir's report that "200,000 tents of the Turks converted" to Islam in the year 960 within the Karakhanid domain. Scholars often cite these numbers as evidence how Islam completely dominated Central Asia; however, we must remember that Ibn al-Athir was providing second-hand information, three centuries later, and was deliberately omitting any reference to religious traditions other than Islam (Golden 1990, pp. 357–358; 2011, p. 70). In contrast around the year 1010, the Bishop Abdisho of Merv reported that about 200,000 Turks converted to Christianity and – unlike Ibn al-Athir – he was a contemporary writer (Mingana, 1925, p. 308; cf. Wilmhurst 2016, p. 398). These instances are mentioned merely to stress that historical sources must be understood in the wider context along with the evidence from archaeology.

The sum of archaeological and historical evidence indicates that Christianity continued to flourish in every area of the Karakhanid Khanate, which urges caution in accepting particular Islamic sources at face value. As P. Golden proposed: "Islamic legitimization, which it [the Karakhanids] too eagerly sought, was helpful, but not necessarily decisive with the tribes, the extent of whose Islamization is open to question" [1990, p. 366]. Historical sources are few and inconsistent; that is why archaeology has so much potential in clarifying the historical record. At the moment, texts together with archaeology provides this general impression: In the beginning of the Khanate there was tolerance, if not promotion, of Christianity by the Karluks; however, towards the end, strict Islamization policies were enforced, propounded by western Arab and Persian advisors in the Karakhanid court. Perhaps this heavy-handedness alienated the vast majority of people in Central Asia, so that when the small group of Kara-Khitai from China arrived at Balasagun in 1134, they found willing subjects amongst non-Muslims.

When the Kara-Khitan triumphed over the Karakhnids, it shocked the Muslim world. The Khitans stopped Islamic expansion and reversed Arabic cultural colonialism. Pro-Islamic chroniclers (such as Juvaini, Ibn al-Qalanisi, Ibn Al-Asir, Abulfeda, Ibn al-Athir, Juzjani etc.) unanimously lamented that the Khitan elite were "idolaters" (Buddhists and Tengrists) (Biran 2005, 171–201). And yet, the Khitans were tolerant towards Muslims *and* Christians – a policy that the early Mongols later adopted. This openness gave hope to western Christian missionaries whose "Asian consciousness" awoke during the Kara-Khitai khanate; at this point the Latin term "Cataya" emerged (hence the English "Cathay" and Russian "Kitay/Китай", based on "Khitai") which was used to designate all of the Far East, not only China. The Franciscan missionaries, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1180–1252) and William of Rubruck (1220–1293), employ the title *Cataya* in their journey through Central Asia as if the Mongols had continued the Kara-Khitai legacy.

The flowering of Christianity during the early Mongol Empire (13th–14th centuries) was rooted in seeds planted in earlier periods. The western Karakhanids and Kara-Khitans focused on maintaining political alliances rather than their religious affiliation. As mentioned above, this policy benefited the Eastern Church which was not connected to any political agenda. By this point Christians were ethnically mixed, present in most of the Central-Asian demographic groups, including the Iranic, Chinese, Indian and Uyghurs; moreover, primary sources identify five main Turkic-Mongol tribes that emerged by the 13th century, in which Christians were either in the majority or were key leadership positions: the Chigil, Yaghma, Keraites, Naimans, and Onguds.

Mongols under Genghis Khan controlled the Ili Valley between 1203 and 1225. The local peoples, mostly Naimans and Karluks, accepted Mongol authority with little resistance (Juvaini, ed. Boyle 1958.I pp. 75–77). Christianity already had firmly established itself in the region and did not pose a threat to Mongol ideology. After Genghis Khan died in 1227, the Ili Valley passed to his second son Chagatai, who established a powerful and lasting Khanate (Fig. 20). Chagatai's capital at Almalyk was close to the city of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* (52 km, 33 miles). Our archaeological excavations, so far, demonstrate that Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* thrived between the years 1225 and 1350, corresponding to the period when Almalyk developed into a cosmopolis. The Christian kairaks discovered in Almalyk bear a striking correspondence – in terms of form, style, and scale – to those discovered in Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* (Ruji 2006; Pantusov 1903). While we do not have primary sources that describe the people, institutions, or society at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*, we do have contemporary accounts of Almalyk, which hint at the general culture of the area. In other words, the development of Ucharal-

Fig. 20. Map Illustrating the Four Divisions of the Mongol Empire ca. 1250 AD (C. A. Stewart)

Ilibalyk was inextricably connected to the fortunes of Almalyk. As the city of Rome assists archaeologists in understanding the ancient port of Ostia, or how Athens is studied in relation to its port of Pireaus, so Almalyk can give us some insight regarding the riverport of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*.

The date of Almalyk's foundation is unknown. Its name is derived from the Old Turkic *alma* meaning "apple" and *lik* meaning "place", hence "apple orchard" – like the modern city of Almaty – which there may be some historical connection (Golden 1992b, p. 45; Boyle 1964, p. 183 n. 57). Several travelers described passing through Almalyk in the early 13th century. For example, Li-Chi-Ch'ang, wrote about the Confucian monk, K'iu-Ch'ang-Ch'un's journey in 1219:

> We passed the night in a mountain passage…then we entered a broad valley which stretched from east to west, well-watered, with abundant grass, and here and there, some mulberry trees and jujubes. Our next stop was the city of Almalyk. The Muslim [*Pu-su-man*] ruler of the realm came out of the city, together with the Mongol governor, to meet the master. We stopped at a fruit orchard to the west…Cultivating the fields, the people use also artificial irrigation with aqueducts (Bretschneider 1888.I, pp. 69–70).

Here the author is highlighting agriculture, commercial production, and water management – all characteristics of a sophisticated urban society. Likewise, around the year 1220, Si-Yu-Lu recorded how the Khitan statesman, Yelü Chuycai (1190–1244), traveled through the area:

> After leaving the Yin Mountains one arrives at the city of Almalyk…. Eight or nine other cities and towns are subject to Almalyk: in that country grapes and pears abound. The people cultivate five kinds of grain, as we do in China. West of Almalyk there is a large river which is called the Ili (Bretschneider 1888. I, p. 17).

Emphasis here is placed on the fertility of the land and the agriculture, which contributed to the development of a cluster of cities – which can be considered the "Ili River Civilization." Certainly, Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* was one of these satellite cities dependent on Almalyk forming a synergistic relationship.

The rise of the Mongol Empire caused the Ili River settlements to flourish between the years 1200 and 1340. The Ili Valley was *the* main northern "gateway" between East and Central Asia; alternatively, it can be imagined as a "bottleneck" where travelers had to journey through if they were going to the Mongol capital of Karakorum from the wealthy southern cities of Fergana and Kashgar and those to the west, Samarkand and Bukhara. In other words, the Ili River formed a long passage between the Yin-Dzungarian Mountains and the Tian Shan, becoming the shortest, safest, and most comfortable route between

these cities, because it provided fresh water, food, and relatively smooth roads. Even when Karakorum was eclipsed by Khanbalyk (Beijing), the main trade route continued to cross the Ili Valley, hence why Kublai Khan fought so hard to maintain a presence in the area between 1260 and 1290.

Conclusions. The recent archaeological discoveries at Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* provide a greater understanding of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional situation in the later Middle Ages in Semirechye-Zhetysu (today's northern Kyrgyzstan, southeast Kazakhstan, and western Xinjiang in China) as well as Central Asia as a whole. Excavations will continue to reveal more information regarding the medieval Christian community, regarding its size, wealth, and demographics. Apparently Turkic Christians lived along the width and breadth of the region, particularly between the 12th to 14th centuries; as already mentioned, these findings affirm written testimonies of western travelogues of the period. As the material culture increases it provides some understanding concerning how the idea of "Prester John" and the mysterious land of "Tarsakiya" could have developed and circulated throughout medieval Europe (Dickens 2009a).

The epigraphic and forensic evidence also demonstrates this community's connection to the greater Christian world of the period, as shown in the cross typologies on the gravestones and the jewelry found within the burials. Almost all of cross types in the Semirechye-Zhetysu region correspond to those found in western Asia and Europe, dismissing the old idea of a specific "Nestorian cross" – but rather they shared visuals symbols common to other Christian traditions (*see* Kolchenko, in this volume, next chapter). In other words, the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* Christians were not isolated from wider Christendom, even though, they were so far from the early centers of Christianity. In the years 1253 and 1254, respectively, the Latin friar William of Rubruck recorded that he worshiped in a Eastern church near Kayalyk (Kazakhstan, about 200 km north of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*) and celebrated Easter mass along with Nestorian priests in their church at Karakorum (Mongolia) – despite having apprehensions and a critical concern toward many of the "Nestorian" practices (Jackson and Morgan 2009, p. 165, 218–220). Apparently, he did not consider them "heretics" in doctrine (orthodoxy); he was primarily concerned with their customs (orthopraxis) and sinful behavior (drunkenness, murder, stealing, etc.). Archaeology also corroborates the willingness of Eastern Christians to interact with western Christians, as described in the account of Bar Sauma and Markos, as mentioned above, who visited Rome (Italy) and Paris (France) in the 14th century, where they were welcomed as fellow Christians (Moffett 1998, 430–435; Borbone 2000).

All these travelers should be associated with global trade and religious networks which were at times strengthened and, at other times, disrupted by the wars taking place in the region. It is important to emphasize the impact that the Crusades (1096–1390) had on the world economy; the dissemination of cross iconography (developed within various forms

such as textiles and heraldry) was a visual manifestation of that reality. Another conspicuous visual manifestation of world trade is found at the city of Famagusta (Cyprus). Recently the large Gothic-style cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Famagusta has been re-classified as belonging to the Church of the East, built during the 14th century (Olympios 2014, pp. 112–113). It was the largest Syriac church ever built, boldly standing close by to the Byzantine-Greek cathedral of St. George and the Latin cathedral of St. Nicholas. In other words, three Christian communities coexisted and practice their customs freely. With Jerusalem in the hands of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1382) and the weakness of the Palaiologan Dynasty (1261–1453) in Constantinople, the city of Famagusta rose to be *the* main destination of trade goods along the Silk Roads – it was a city full of Syriac-, Armenian-, Greek-, and Latin-speaking Christians who not only traded with each other, but lived alongside each other and their families intermarried. Shifting levels of collaboration and competition must be recognized as we assess 14th-century globalism among different Christian communities.

The site of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* was one of many trading centers where the Church of the East flourished. While few in number, the elaborate grave goods and coin and jewelry hoards, demonstrates long-distant trade connections, benefitting from the so-called "Pax Mongolica" that allowed the Mongols to administer the largest empire the world. Cowrie shells, sometimes used as currency as well as jewelry, were found at Ilibalyk, were certainly not indigenous to the region, but belong to species from the Indian Ocean. The same is true of the ocean coral found on two of the bead bracelets of the above-mentioned female grave. Likewise, while excavating the walls of the shahristan, our team uncovered a jewelry hoard consisting of silver bracelets and ocean coral necklaces, providing further evidence of wealth and trad.

Our excavation of a Christian cemetery in the greater context of Ucharal-*Ilibalyk* has been able to answer many of our research aims, but has also posed many more questions. Important aspects of material culture requires further research, of which archaeology in eastern Kazakhstan and western China can provide significant data for analysis: the development of glazed ceramics, agricultural production, social hierarchy, ethnic diversity, tribal identity, health (including the possibility of the Bubonic Plague pathogens), and manufacturing (iron, glass, and ceramics). The exact identity of these people and the reasons behind the Ucharal-*Ilibalyk*'s abandonment in the early 15th century are also questions that must be answered. While the epigraphy and initial excavations of the skeletal remains point to a community of indigenous Turkic-speaking Christians, modern methods of examination can be employed, particularly in the area of ancient DNA analysis. Such examinations take time, a great deal of expertise, and a significant amount of finances. With continued pursuit and consistent investigation, the answers to the question of identity along with the possibility of finding a monumental building, such as a church, is expected.

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Medieval Christianity of Kyrgyzstan according to archaeological sources

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Historiography. The archaeological study of medieval Christianity in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia began in 1885 with the opening of two medieval cemeteries – the sites known as "Peri-Pishpek" (near the village of Kara-Jigach on the southeastern outskirts of the current city of Bishkek) and "Peri-Tokmak" (Burana). Research here began during the Semirechye Oblast of the Steppe General Governorship, when the land surveyor V. A. Andreyev ("who organized the land allotment near Pishpek city for the peasants of the village of Alamedina and for the Kirghiz of the Alamedin volost") found several stones with an image of the cross and inscriptions in a language incomprehensible to him and the local population. He informed his superiors in a report dated June 17, 1885 (when the stones were delivered) and, moreover, through the authorities, this information reached the Imperial Archaeological Commission (Pantusov 1887, p. 62–63). In the fall of the same year, the doctor of the Pishpek military hospital F. V. Poyarkov revealed a second cemetery – south of the Burana Tower near the city of Tokmak; these he reported in several letters addressed to scientific organizations and the media, including one published in St. Petersburg's *Eastern Review* (Poyarkov 1885).[1]

The Archaeological Commission, the only state body in Russia that could grant permission for archaeological research (and they allocated money for that!), instructed N. N. Pantusov to conduct field surveys in both cemeteries. He was an orientalist (one of the first pupils of the well-known St. Petersburg orientalist V. V. Grigoryev) and a senior official of the Semirechye regional administration according to official posts (*Reports of the Archaeological Commission for 1885*, henceforth notated as *RAC 1885*, 1891, p. XCV; Pantusov 1887, p. 5). N. N. Pantusov invited A.M. Fetisov to participate in this process who was a local historian by nature and a "scientific gardener of the Pishpek State Garden".

[1] The newspaper *Eastern Review* was founded in 1882 in St. Petersburg by N. M. Yadrintsev. In 1888, the publication was relocated to Irkutsk. It published articles on the history, geography, ethnography, economics of Siberia, and reported on scientific expeditions and research of scientists. It ceased publication in 1906.

They carried out most of the work at the Pishpek cemetery: 35 burials were excavated in 1885 (producing no documentation), and in 1886, another 85 burials (*RAC 1886*, 1891, p. CLXI). At the Burana cemetery in 1885, during the process of excavations, F.V. Poyarkov unearthed (without permits) four skeletons (Yadrintsev 1886, pp. 158–159), and in 1886, A. M. Fetisov on behalf of N. N. Pantusov investigated another 34 burials (Fetisov 1888, l. 102–120). Textual reports on the excavations, supported with graphic materials, were submitted to the Archaeological Commission that published research on the Peri-Pishpek cemetery in shortened form (*RAC 1886*, 1891, p. CLIX–CLX).

The archaeological context of the initial phase of the study of medieval Christianity was, however, overshadowed by historical and philological studies of the grave epitaphs from these cemeteries. Originally, the discovered stones themselves were predominantly gathered and stored in the city of Verny (now Almaty), serving as the administrative center at that time – 150 gravestones were deposited there in 1886 (Pantusov 1888, p. 4). But a portion of the stones were left in place. A number of the original epitaphs were sent to other cities. It is known that initially the Moscow Archaeological Society received five stones from F. V. Poyarkov (Slutsky 1889, p. 2), and then ten more were delivered there later (Slutsky 1891, p. 176). The archaeological commission at the initial stage of the study had three stones and three more epitaphs, and these were received from V. D. Gorodetsky during 1886 (Chwolson 1887, p. 217, note 2). In his report for the Archaeological Research Commission as of 1886, N. N. Pantusov wrote: "Many of the stones of the Pishpek cemetery sent to the Commission were originals (mainly from the opening of the graves)" (Pantusov 1888, p. 4). Somewhat later, S. S. Slutsky wrote that D. A. Chwolson had about 100 genuine stones with inscriptions (Slutsky 1889, p. 1). In addition, there is information regarding how some stones with inscriptions were sent to Tashkent, Kazan, and Vladivostok.

The chronology of the scientific publications of data concerning the Christian cemeteries, and the epitaphs themselves, are as follows. First, N. Yadrintsev in his "Notes of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences" published a letter by F. V. Poyarkov on the discovery of the Burana cemetery and his thoughts on its importance (Yadrintsev 1886). In another academic article, D. A. Chwolson, the leading Russian specialist in Semitic languages at that time, including Syriac, published the first twenty-two inscriptions in German, providing them with necessary accompanying information, concluding that they all belong to the Nestorians (Chwolson 1886). Somewhat later, in the 1886 volume of the *Notes of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society* (*NEBRAS*), F. V. Poyarkov wrote an article about the Burana cemetery with additional information about the previously received information from N. N. Pantusov regarding the opening of the "Peri-Pishpek" cemetery that was printed in the *Eastern Review* (*Archaeological discoveries in the Semirechensk region* 1887, pp. 33–34). In the next issue of the same volume, N. N. Pantusov published: his description of "Peri-Pishpek" cemetery as well as the Russian translations of the first twenty-two stones (mentioned above) and six more grave inscriptions translated by D. A. Chwolson; and he also

provided additional notes and corrections regarding the previously published information in the earlier issue (Pantusov 1887).[2] In Chwolson's publications, the inscriptions were printed in Syriac typeface with line partitions and translated into Russian, and individual stones (6 examples) were published photographically (Chwolson 1887a; Chwolson 1887b; Chwolson 1887c). The discovery of Christian artifacts in Semirechye was reported at the Vienna Congress of Orientalists in 1886, and there was even a discussion on this topic at the Russian Archaeological Congresses in Yaroslavl (the 7th Congress in 1887) and Moscow (8th, 1890). In 1889 S. S. Slutsky published his translations of 314 epitaphs, including six stones located at the Moscow Archaeological Society, the photographs of which were also given in the publication (Slutsky 1889, pp. 28-38, Tabs. I–II). In 1890 D. A. Chwolson published 230 inscriptions in German in *Memoires of the Russian Academy of Sciences* (Chwolson 1890). Then, in his next article, S. S. Slutsky announced how ten more stones from the Peri-Pishpek cemetery were sent to the Moscow Archaeological Society, and these he translated (Slutsky 1891).

In the aforementioned publications and reports, conclusions were made that are still relevant to the present day. In particular, it was determined that the inscriptions were made in the Syriac alphabet, partly in Syriac and partly in Turkic, and a significant portion of the inscriptions had words in two languages. In his efforts translating such inscriptions in St. Petersburg, D. A. Chwolson gratefully emphasized the assistance of V. V. Radlov, while S. S. Slutsky closely worked with F. E. Korsh in Moscow (Radlov 1890; Korsh 1889). However, a number of theses in these early publications, particularly, of the main researchers – D. A. Chwolson and S. S. Slutsky – remain debatable. Thus S. S. Slutsky, after comparing his translations with those of D. A. Chwolson, identified discrepancies in 90 out of 155 analyzed cases; that is, he fully or partially agreed with 28 translations provided by D. A. Chwolson, and of the remaining 62 he kept his own opinion (Slutsky 1891, p. 190).

Systematic archaeological field studies of Christian sites were undertaken in 1892. They were conducted by N. N. Pantusov and A. M. Fetisov according to the issued permits from the Archaeological Commission. Their purpose was to identify, collect, photograph, and make estampages of gravestones located at two medieval cemeteries. Thus, there were 350 inscriptions recorded at Peri-Pishpek; the stones without inscriptions were not estampaged, "except for dozens of two images" that included cross images. Since some of the stones that

[2] "Notes of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society" was published in separate volumes, each of which consisted of four issues in soft binding. At the same time, pagination continued as started in the previous issue. Such a publication system allowed publishing information: on the facts behind the discovery of Christian cemeteries in the Chuy Valley in the 1st volume of 1886; in the 2nd edition – to publish a description of the Peri-Pishpek cemetery made by Pantusov and translations of the first twenty-two inscriptions done by D. A. Chwolson, that were accompanied by information on their graphics and language (Syriac, Syro-Turkic and Turkic) and a brief historical background on Nestorianism and Christianity in East Asia; in the issue No. 3 – to provide translations of another six new inscriptions; and in the issue No. 4 – to introduce amendments to previously proposed translations.

were found earlier had been left on the site were destroyed, all the stones found in 1892 were "taken to Pishpek and placed for storage in the archive of the Tokmak district administration" (*RAC 1892*, 1894, pp. 73–74); nothing is known about their fate. The most important find of the year was the discovery of a gravestone with an Armenian-Syriac inscription, brilliantly published and interpreted by N. Y. Marr (Marr 1894). Later, N. Y. Marr more clearly expressed his ideas about the gravestones – in the Semirechye region, that there were not only Nestorians, but also Monophysites or Melkites (Marr 1906). In the Burana cemetery in 1892, there were only found five stones that were delivered to Verny, and three of them were photographed (*RAC 1892*, 1894, p. 74). Along with the search for stones at the Peri-Pishpek cemetery in the ancient fortress (more precisely, the settlement) where the cemetery is located, there were conducted minor excavations that revealed the stone of an oil press workshop (as interpreted in the report), which was laden with collapsed burnt logs of pillars, as well as a bathhouse with a system of underground vents for warm air and a corner constructed with fired-bricks belonging to an unidentifiable structure. However, even in the original report, information about this was extremely brief and was not accompanied by visual corroborating evidence. These excavations also revealed a rough pectoral cross (Fig. 1) (*RAC 1892*, 1894, pp. 74–75; Pantusov 1889, l. 172).

Inscriptions from the first gravestones almost instantly became the subject of study, translation and publication but, in contrast, the processing of new 350 images, received in 1892, was delayed. Chwolson included twenty Turkic-Syriac inscriptions of this collection in the 1895 edition, and the rest in the 1897 edition in German (Chwolson 1895; Chwolson 1897).

V. V. Bartold was greatly interested in the publication of the first materials on Christianity in Central Asia and, at that time, he was still only a student at St. Petersburg University. This interest turned into a scholarly work that was honored with a silver medal from the university, and somewhat later it was revised and published in *NEBRAS* (Bartold 1894); eventually, it became a classic, printed in several editions (Bartold 1964; Bartold 1996, pp. 254–294). After graduating from the university and a one-year internship, this researcher made an expedition to the area about which he wrote, basing his research on written medieval sources and he visited the Talas, Chuy and Ili Valleys, the Issyk-Kul lake, and Tien Shan mountains, inspecting archaeological sites there (Bartold 1996, 371–448).[3] He visited the Christian cemeteries in the company of F. V. Poyarkov at Pishpek and V. P. Rovnyagin at Tokmak. The publications of V. V. Barthold provide two important sets of facts: the collection of all the information of eastern authors who wrote about medieval Christianity in Central Asia, available at that time in Russian, and the demonstration of the presence of monuments of a settled medieval population in the Chuy Valley and other regions examined by the researcher.

Fig. 1. Cross, found in 1892 during the excavations on the site of Kara-Jigach (Pantusov 1889)

The next milestone in the study of Christianity of the region was the discovery of a third cemetery near Almalyk in 1902 (Pantusov 1902) and its gravestones' inscriptions were translated by P. K. Kokovtsov (Kokovtsov 1906). However, because this area lies outside the borders of current Kyrgyzstan, the account of this site will be limited.

The discovery of the Almalyk cemetery heightened interest in Christianity in these mountainous regions. That is why members of the Turkestan circle of amateur archaeology identified a large bronze cauldron, accidentally found in the Susamyr volost (Kyrgyzstan), as a Christian (baptismal) font ("Discovery of a copper font…" 1901, p. 86), and they also identified Tash-Rabat as a Christian monastery, relying on legends collected among the local population (Kallaur 1898, pp. 120–121; Pantusov 1902, pp. 20–23; Abramov 1901).

In 1908 N. N. Pantusov's discovery of the fourth Christian cemetery was retold in *NEBRAS* – located in the Issyk-Kul region near the village of Pokrovskoye on the Zauka / Juuka River (*NEBRAS* 1908, p. XV). Credit of the discovery of this new cemetery apparently belonged to the rural village priest Dmitry Rozhdestvensky (Kokovtsov 1909, p. 777). In 1909 a letter of N. N. Pantusov concerning the circumstances of the identification this new cemetery was published in Tashkent (Pantusov 1909). According to the data provided by him, there were found four Christian epitaphs, one Muslim kairak, and another stone with a Chinese inscription. But there is only one Christian stone with a Syriac-Turkic inscription and that was published due to P. K. Kokovtsov, who recorded it based on a photograph (together with a rather large, but accidentally found, inscription from the Burana cemetery) (Kokovtsov 1909). The fate of the other three kairaks remain unknown.

For the next 27 years, there was nothing new published about medieval Christianity in the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan following the works of P. K. Kokovtsov (1909, p. 776).[4] Of course, there were individual studies, returning to the previously published artifacts, for

[3] There is a detail that should be noted: organizing this trip to archaeological sites and having received a travel grant from the Academy of Sciences and St. Petersburg University, he did not request a permit for this study from the Archaeological Commission. And another curious detail: V. V. Bartold did not approach the researchers of these Christian monuments – N. N. Pantusov and A. M. Fetisov – but preferred other guides.

[4] "In such a situation there are wishes that future research in the area of the ancient Christian cemeteries of the Semirechye should not be directed so much towards finding as many gravestones with inscriptions in the four already-known points (at Pishpek, Tokmak, Almalyk ruins and at Pokrovskoye village). Currently we have sufficient answers regarding the question of the language, content, and antiquity of the Semirechye Christian inscriptions; [and additional stones] could only increase quantitatively the available epigraphic material, but it would not significantly change the picture provided by the previous data – as far as to the discovery of new places with Christian-Syriac inscriptions" (P. K. Kokovtsov 1909, p. 776).

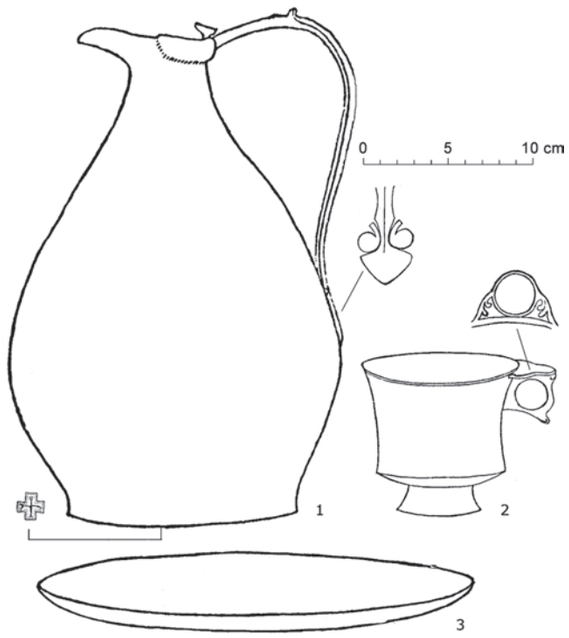

Fig. 2. Set of silverware found in 1923 in the village of Novo-Pokrovka (Gorodetsky 1926)

example, as in case of the scholarship of I. A. Castagne (1910, pp. 261–300) and some minor information about cemeteries published in entries of an encyclopedic nature (Masalsky 1913, p. 319). But nothing more!

Then in 1926 the Almaty researcher V. D. Gorodetsky published a set of silver utensils (Fig. 2). It was accidentally found by locals in 1923, "when gathering clay for use at a home from a mound located within the area of the Pokrovskoye village" (Gorodetsky 1926). The set consisted of a dish without ornamentation, a cup with an artistically designed handle including an anthropomorphic image on the base (it is not shown in the picture of V. D. Gorodetsky, but described in the text) and a jug. At the bottom of the jug there were five embossed equal-arm crosses, which were somewhat asymmetrical, allowing the attribution of the entire set as Christian artifacts or, in any case, they testified to a master-metalsmiths' knowledge about Christians and their symbolism.

In the early Soviet era, however, the investigation of religious subjects was irrelevant. This new reality, most likely, explains why little resonance permeated the academic community when a fragment of fired brick with a cross and a short inscription in the Syro-Turkic language was discovered at the Krasnaya Rechka site in 1938 (Bernshtam 1941, p. 107, Tab. 17) (Fig. 3). A. N. Bernshtam did not even include this find in the works of the expedition led by him, but only mentioned it in a footnote which illustrated his thesis about the multiethnicity of the people buried in the Karakhanid necropolis, located at Krasnaya Rechka (1950, p. 20, note 2). In his article, however, he conveyed the general content of this inscription with reference to the translation made by A. Y. Borisov (Bernshtam 1941, p. 107). Borisov himself published a translation of the inscription of the brick with a cross with some comments only later in 1963, related to, probably, the additional discoveries of Christian artifacts made since then (Borisov 1963).

These new discoveries took place in 1954 at the ancient settlement of Ak Beshim. It happened within the framework of the "Kyrgyz complex archaeological and ethnographic expedition" of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the Ak-Beshim Project was under

the leadership of the Moscow-based archaeologist L. R. Kyzlasov, who conducted intensive excavations of the site. During the first year (1953) work was carried out at Area I – containing a Buddhist temple. Then, in the second year, in addition to completing the studies of Area I, under the guidance of Kyzlasov, other excavations were conducted in three more places[5], which were identified in the initial publication as a "Funeral complex" (Area III), a "Christian church and cemetery" (Area IV) and a "Castle" (Area V) (Kyzlasov 1959, pp. 231–233).[6]

Fig. 3. Image of the cross and Syriac inscription "George the Blacksmith" on a fragment of fired brick. Accidental find of 1939 at the shahristan of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement in the area of early Muslim burials (Bernshtam 1941)

At Area IV archaeologists began excavating two sections, consisting of two-meter square trenches at the center and they expanded these outwards towards the edges. There they uncovered a ruined monumental building and they examined its layout. Inside the building and on its eastern side, there were various types of burials, mainly with skeletons orientated in an west-east direction [head at the west, feet to the east]. A pectoral cross was found on one of the buried persons. The layout of the building, the orientation of the burials, and the pectoral cross allowed them to interpret the site precisely as a Christian church. The brief descriptions in the initial publication were supported with a ground plan (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 232). When the work was reprinted, the text was expanded with new information and these were accompanied by illustrations, such as: another ground plan without the burials depicted; two elevations showing the wall construction; two drawings showing how the bricks were laid at the entrance of the burials; drawings of three ceramic vessels; and four photographs of a ceramic cup with a molding in the form of a male face (Kyzlasov 2006, pp. 322–329). The author of the excavations dated the site to the 8th century.

Artifacts with the image of a cross were found at two other sites. Moreover, the cross in both cases have equal-arm lengths, with flared ends. At Area III, this form is also present on a ceramic vessel, and at Area V on cylindrical bricks (Kyzlasov 2006, Figs. 105.II, 115.1) (Fig. 4). However, the combination of these items with other artifacts in the same context did not allow the researcher to claim that these objects were particularly Christian.

[5] At Area II, a stratigraphic excavation site in the shahristan, research was conducted here by Kyrgyz archaeologist P. N. Kozhemyako, who led an independent team as part of the expedition.

[6] When reissued in 2006, the titles of the properties were partially changed. It became: Area III – "Manichean burial complex" and Area V – ruins of the "'tower of silence' of the 6th–7th centuries" (Kyzlasov, 2006. p. 314, 322, 330).

In 1966, in the area of the medieval Christian cemetery near the village of Pokrovka near Issyk-Kul, a resident of Saruu village found a new kairak with Syriac inscriptions. It was published by C. D. Jumagulov (1982, pp. 40–43, Tab. XVIII). Probably, this object became one of the motivators behind researchers and enthusiasts of Kyrgyzstan [archaeology] to intensify the collecting and publication of such artifacts, including those related to Christianity. Also, Jumagulov prepared and published three editions of the *Epigraphy of Kyrgyzstan*; in each of these, there was a place for Christian artifacts, and a special study on the language of the Christian inscriptions in the region (Jumagulov 1971). The first issue of the *Epigraphy of Kyrgyzstan* included seven previously published epitaphs (Jumagulov 1963, pp. 45–58). In the second issue, in addition to the already mentioned inscription from Issyk-Kul, there were two Syriac inscriptions (one from the school collection of N. D. Cherkassov) and a photograph of a stone with a cross and an imitation of a short inscription from the school collection of S. S. Reva (Novo-Pokrovka village on the eastern outskirts of Bishkek) (Jumagulov 1982, pp. 39–45, Tab. XVIII–X; Jumagulov 1983). According to the description on the museum label in the early 2000s, this stone was found in the area of the ancient settlement known as Novopokrovskoye-5. In the third issue of the *Epigraphy of Kyrgyzstan* there was published: a collection of twenty-four epitaphs collected by a schoolteacher Y. N. Golendukhin in the vicinity of the Kara-Jigach village (Jumagulov 1987, p. 42–54, Tab. I–XI); the tombstone that was stored at that time in the school of the village of Kok-Jar which is neighboring Kara-Jigach (Jumagulov 1987, p. 56, Tab. XIII) (i.e. twenty-five new kairaks from the Peri-Pishpek cemetery); two stones from the Burana cemetery (Jumagulov 1987, p. 54–56, Tab. XII–XIII); and new photographs of twenty-four previously published kairaks from the collections of the Hermitage and the Historical Museum of Kazakhstan (Jumagulov 1987, p. 56, Tab. XIV, *1–24*). This researcher developed a specific publication standard: he provided a photograph of the monument and its line drawing; typographic text of the inscriptions, their transliteration in Cyrillic and translation; brief information about the location of the monument and its circumstances; the size and color of the stones; as well as the storage location at the time of publication.

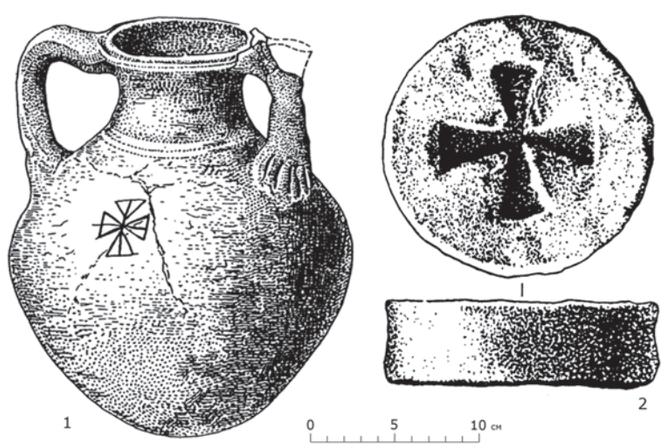

Fig. 4. Artifacts depicting a cross from the excavations of 1954 on the site of Ak-Beshim: 1 – a vessel from the Area III (Manichaean funeral complex); 2 – one of the fired bricks of the Area V (Castle / "Tower of silence") (Kyzlasov 1959)

It seems that by the mid-1970s, the discussion that started in the late 19th century – about the place of manufacture and dating of the Grigoryevsky and Anikovsky silver dishes-patens with Christian themes – came to an end. V. P. Darkevich and B. Marshak's excellent analysis convincingly showed the correct position of V. V. Stassov, regarding the place of their production – that is, Semirechye in the 9th–10th centuries (Darkevich, Marshak 1974; Stassov 1905).

Important data on Christianity were rather unexpectedly obtained during excavations of the upper stratigraphic layer of the citadel of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement in the early 1980s. Two kairaks with Syriac inscriptions were found at the base of the uppermost building dating back to the 11th–12th centuries, rather visually similar to previously published examples. The head of this research project, Kyrgyz archaeologist V. D. Goryacheva, referred to the interpretation of A. V. Paikova, who dated them between the years 789 and 909 (Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994, p. 91; Goryacheva 1988, pp. 62–65). The publication of this material by a specialist in Syriac-language did not take place; according to V. D. Goryacheva, the artifact could not be sent to A. V. Paikova because of his death in 1984 (Goryacheva 1988, p. 65). In such a context, it turns out that these two stones found here were the most ancient gravestones of the region. This statement raised questions and doubts among experts.

At the same time during the 1980s, there was a publication of photographs of the first medieval pectoral cross from the territory of Kyrgyzstan (*History of the Kyrgyz SSR* 1984).[7] When published, the cross was dated to the 8th century with no explanation provided. It was found on a woman, buried in the necropolis of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement (Goryacheva 1988, p. 67). In the same publication there was a report on the discovery of a cross in 1972, made by the last expedition led by P. N. Kozhemyako, who was able to present or publish it because of his premature death; nevertheless, the 1988 publication provides a drawing of the cross (Goryacheva 1988, p. 67, Fig. 20).

In the late 1980s another category of archaeological artifact, due to the work of Iranian linguists, began to be associated with medieval Christianity. A large ceramic storage vessels is called a *khum* (хум) in Central Asia. On the rims of some of these are Sogdian inscriptions (sometimes identified as earlier Uighur script). On one khum dating to the 10th–11th century, there is the following phrase inscribed (according to the paleography of handwriting) from the site of Krasnaya Rechka:

> This khum is for the teacher Iruk-Tegin. Master Pastun. May it be complete. Amen. Amen!

It is the word "teacher" (malp'ânâ) and the Christian-manner of the repeated "Amen" that became the basis for its Christian identity (Livshits 1987, p. 82).

[7] In this 1984 publication, a colored photograph of these crosses (Plate 2) was placed between pages 320–321. The characteristics of this object, as well as the church, excavated by L. R. Kyzlasov in 1954, will be considered below.

A small but remarkably interesting collection of articles regarding ancient and medieval Christianity in Central Asia was published in 1994 at Tashkent. One chapter related to Kyrgyzstan was written for this collection by V. D. Goryacheva and S. Y. Peregudova. This chapter provides a brief overview of the entire Christian heritage of the country, accumulated by the 1990s (Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994). In this regard, the article became a landmark, summarizing the research of this subject during the Soviet Era.

At the turn of the millennium – in the years 1997 and 1998 – the largest medieval Christian site of Central Asia, a complex of Christian churches in the Ancient Ak-Beshim settlement, was discovered and partially excavated. It was investigated by a joint Kyrgyz-Russian expedition of the Institute of History[8] of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic and the State Hermitage Museum under the direction of L .M. Vedutova and G. L. Semenov, respectively. The results were recorded in a series of articles and a collection of reports based on the results of intermittent excavations (Semenov 1999; 2002). After that, the Kyrgyz team conducted research independently for two years – 2000–2001 – but the results remain unpublished so far, with the exception of the layout included in the monograph by V. D. Goryacheva who did not participate in the research (Goryacheva 2010, Fig. 69) as well as a rather unusual interpretation of the site made by L. M. Vedutova (Vedutova 2015, p. 131). Based on the finds revealed at the floor level, the area was dated to the 10th–11th centuries, and was estimated to have functioned for about 100 years (Semenov 2002, p. 95).

It is necessary to mention one more category of medieval Christian artifact, of which the number of known examples has been growing recently – the pectoral cross. The vast majority of them have been found "accidentally" by amateurs using metal detectors – a practice becoming widespread with development of recent technology. Some of these crosses have went to various museums (such as those located at the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University (KRSU), Burana, and the Bishkek and Kyrgyz Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church), and others have entered private collections. Some have been published in the form of exhibition catalogues and inventory tables, and there has been some attempts to classify them (Klein, Reck 2004; Ternovaya 2004; Rott 2005; Stavskaya et al. 2013, p. 87; Baipakov, Ternovaya, and Goryacheva 2007, pp. 201–205, Figs. 89, 308). But the process of developing a consensus opinion among the scientific community is still ongoing.

In conclusion of this historiography section, we should note that western scholars have always had an interest in the Christian artifacts of the East. This attraction persists to the present day. First of all, they are interested in the gravestone inscriptions. Researchers from Europe and America turn to the originals, translate them again, sometimes making significant adjustments, as in the case of dating the stones from the Krasnaya Rechka (Klein 2000; Dickens 2016).

In the next section we will examine the subject of medieval Christianity in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia based on our previous studies (Kolchenko 2002, 2003, and 2004). Here,

[8] Since 2003, the Institute of History has been known as "the Institute of History and Cultural Heritage".

we will further develop the previously published propositions, making some adjustments in a number of cases, focusing on unfairly marginalized factual data, and critically examining the conclusions of our predecessors.

* * *

As we strove to show in the historiographical survey above, there are several categories of archaeological sites on the territory of the Kyrgyzstan that have been identified as Christian: 1) buildings; 2) cemeteries with gravestones and separate burials; and 3) individual items with corresponding symbols.

Buildings

The buildings include two sites excavated on the site of Ak-Beshim: a church with a necropolis in shahristan-2 (Kyzlasov 1959, pp. 231–233; Kyzlasov 2006, pp. 322–329) and the "complex of Christian churches" in the southeastern corner of shahristan-1 (Semenov 2002, pp. 44–114), as well as two "chapels"/"tombs" in the village of Kara-Jigach with the Peri-Pishpek cemetery identified by N. N. Pantusov.

The Christian church at the Ancient Ak-Beshim settlement, excavated by L. R. Kyzlasov in 1954, was located within the borders of shahristan-2 (rabad / Kara-Khitan quarter), 165 m east of the wall of shahristan-1 and about 60 m from the northern wall of shahristan-2.

The publication (and the typewritten report) did not provide information on the condition and function of the area before the excavation. The site layout in 1938, published by A. N. Bernshtam (Bernshtam 1941, Fig. XXIX; Chuy Valley 1950, Tab. XVIII), and then with minimal changes reproduced by L. R. Kyzlasov (1959, Fig. 3), in the area of the location of the church does not show any mounds. All the examined areas – both by Bernshtam in 1938–1939 and Kyzlasov in 1953–1954 – are still clearly visible on the earliest aerial photograph taken in 1966, which we discovered [in the archives]. But this photograph does not show significant relief contours in the area which is of interest to us – there is only a small mound, about 15 m in diameter, inclining about 20 m to the southeast of the excavated church (Fig. 5). It is necessary to take into account mounds that are clearly visible in the aerial photograph around the excavation, which hide the remains of the original topography of the excavated area.

The church, as we noted in the historiography section above, was partially opened by four trenches (Fig. 6). The building was latitudinal in orientation. The published description indicated that its external dimensions were 36×15 m. A large area was occupied by a vast yard (27×12 m based on internal measurements) located at the western end. At the east end along the central axis, there is an adjoining altar chamber, and it is connected to the courtyard by a passage. To the south of the altar there is another room with its own exit to the south, located at the western end of the room along the courtyard wall.

Fig. 5. Part of the aerial photograph of the area of the Christian church on the Ak-Beshim site in 1966

The aerial photograph of 1966 suggests that the object was completely excavated along the outer perimeter. At the same time, there were narrow trenches of about 1 m visible on the photograph along the walls extending from a north-south direction. On the western side, the trench is visible at about three meters from the front of the western wall, and from the east – about five. This means that the site's western excavation trench was 7.5 m wide and the eastern one was 15 m. Two internal trenches, that are almost invisible in the aerial photograph of 1966, were 2.5 m wide according to the measurements based on the plan (Kyzlasov 1959, Fig. 56). The unexcavated areas measured (from west to east) 5, 8 and 3 m wide, respectively, and remained untouched in the courtyard.

The walls of the courtyard were made of *pakhsa* (compressed earth) blocks. The thickness of the walls is 1.5 m, based on the given dimensions and measurements from the plan. In the eastern part, they survive up to a height of 1.5 m (according to measurements from the section).

There were no constructions found within the courtyard – that is, within the excavated interior at the western and eastern ends – judging by the lack of information about them in the text and diagrams. During excavation two burials were found in the interior towards western end.[9] In the courtyard at the eastern end, there were identified and graphically

[9] The burials of this area will be specifically discussed further in the section below on cemeteries of medieval Christians of Kyrgyzstan.

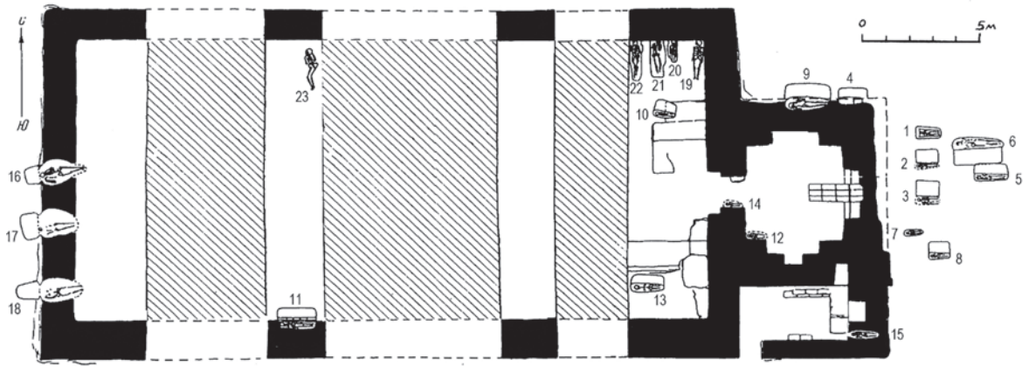

Fig. 6. Ground plan of the church with a cemetery, excavated in 1954 by L. R. Kyzlasov (Kyzlasov 1959)

recorded some structures and six burials. Based on this information, we consider the author's assumption about the shelters along the walls as purely speculative, lacking any substantial evidence (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 231). In our opinion, the location of burial 11 by the southern wall also testifies against this proposal – it could hardly have been placed under a shelter. In the middle of the eastern wall of the courtyard there was a passage 1.4 m wide, placed within a niche measuring 2 m wide and 0.5 m deep.

The text does not mention the structures at the eastern wall of the courtyard as reflected on the plan (Fig. 6). Two elements adjacent to each other are shown to the north of the passage, they project from the courtyard wall and extend 1.7 and 2 m outwards. One element was 1.2 m long; it is just south of the passage and is shown from the western end of the larger structure, i.e. its southern edge was at the same level as the northern face of the passage.

Also to the south of the passage, directly along the entire wall of the courtyard, to the corner there are three features with a ragged western edge. In that area a certain structural form extended from the eastern wall of the courtyard towards the west beyond the eastern trench.

Based on the thickness of all the structures shown – from 0.9 to 1.2 m according to measurements from the drawing – they may have been walls. But, judging by the imprecision and intermittent drafting of the contours, we can assume that they had a rather small height. In our interpretation of the plan, we assume that these may be the remaining top surface of walls that were preserved underlying the construction phases, which were not identified and investigated in any way [by the original excavators].

The exits leading out from the courtyard are not indicated either in the plan or in the text. It is logical to assume that they remained in the unexcavated sections of the side walls. Based on this assumption, S. Y. Peregudova showed three passages in the northern and southern walls in her visual reconstruction (Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994, Fig. 18). Based upon the aerial photograph of 1966, we believe that there were no passages in the southern wall at all, but in the northern one there was only one, located in the middle of the courtyard wall

in the place where, in the picture, a thin winding white line of the path intersects the wall of the building.

The "central" (altar) chamber is located east of the courtyard on the longitudinal axis of the structure. In plan, it has a so-called cruciform shape, which indicates that it has niches in the middle of each wall rising from the floor level, and in its western wall there is the passage; Kyzlasov reports that the size of this chamber was 5.3×4.8 m.

In the textual description, it is written that the walls were made up of *pakhsa* blocks, but their dimensions were not given. The thickness of all four walls according to measurements from the ground plan was 2 m. The height of the remains was up to 2.5 m from the floor level (according to measurements from the elevation drawing) and 3 m when measured from the exterior. On the elevation cross-section of the walls included in the revised publication, it illustrates three rows of blocks separated by courses of mudbricks, and at the base of the chamber there was masonry formed by six rows of bricks, which measured about 0.6 m in height. Moreover, the elements in the southeast corner (of the courtyard mentioned above) was shown to consist of bricks from its foundations to a height of 1.1 m, that is, from the floor reaching the next course of mudbricks (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 109) (Fig. 7).

L. R. Kyzlasov suggests that the chamber was roofed by a "false dome of intermixed layers of pakhsa and mudbrick" (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 232). Protruding wall elements are shown on cross-sections at almost every corner of the chamber, beginning from the top of the brickwork. Moreover, they are shown to be unequal with different angles and inclinations

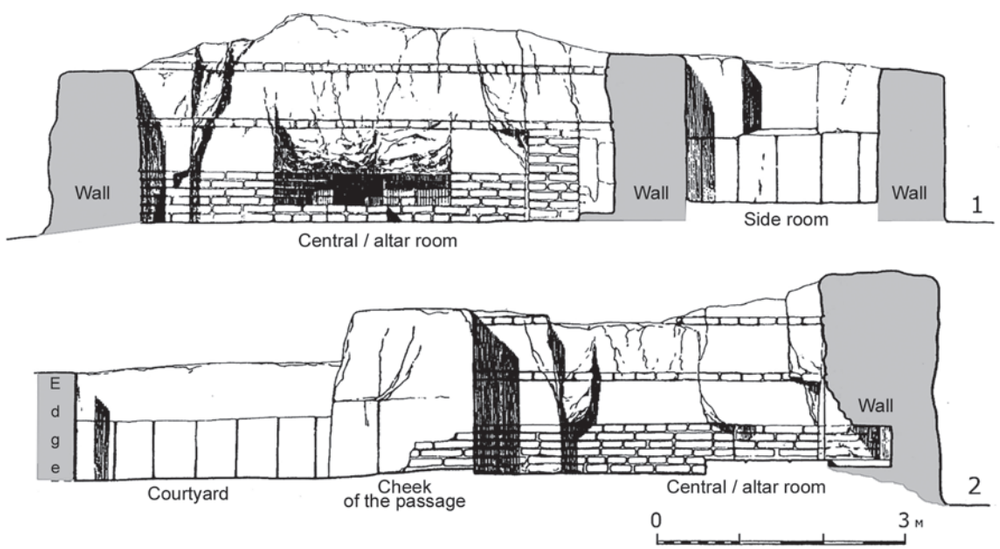

Fig. 7. Architectural elevations and cross-sections of the eastern part of the excavation site of the church at the ancient Ak-Beshim settlement (1954): 1 – transverse through the central and lateral premises; 2 – longitudinal through the altar room and part of the courtyard to the edge (Kyzlasov 2006)

but interrupted by the same horizontal courses of bricks; in contrast, the other cross-sections of the walls are shown perpendicular [to the ground] up to the entire height. Therefore, probably, these protrusions should be perceived as [brackets under] squinches commonly found in domed structures.

On the published ground plan, all three niches are shown with a width of just over two meters and a depth of 0.7–0.8 m (according to measurements from the plan). In addition, another niche of approximately the same depth of 0.7–0.8 m is shown within the southern niche, i.e. the main niche is divided into three approximately equal parts. At the opposite niche, according to the cross-section illustrating its corners, the above-described protrusions are shown starting from a level slightly lower than the first course of bricks. These squinch [brackets] emerge from the corners at an angle of about 45° and eventually, after 0.4–0.5 m at an even lower level than the second brick course, they become perpendicular again (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 109.2). In the same illustration, on the northern face of the passage, the brickwork is shown as if destroyed on the western side and later included in the *pakhsa* wall.

The most remarkable cross-section illustrates the eastern niche. It turns out that it is very low: the level of the top of the brickwork (~ 0.6 m from the floor level) shows a horizontal overhang of about 0.5 m in depth; from the façade of the niche, there is an incline (of about 45 °) with a ragged surface, rising from the level of the first brick course to the perpendicular wall, merging with the wall surrounding the niche (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 109.2). Thus, the outlines of this niche on the plan become clear.

From this eastern niche, based on the ground plan, there emerged a platform (altar or ambo ?), made of brick. Its dimensions (measured from the eastern wall) were 2.2×0.8 m. The cross-section allows us to determine its height – two courses of brick, i.e. 0.2 m. Moreover, in the niche, its height was lower by one layer of brick. So, this platform is made of brick measuring 55×26 – 27×8–9 cm.

In the text part there is some indication of the wall decoration. Kyzlasov wrote that "the crumbling small pieces of alabaster stucco kept traces of bright paint from frescos" (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 232). Based on our experience, it is hard to understand what the word "fresco" (фресок) in the above quote means, if it is an indication of a particular technique; probably, it refers only to the fact that the surfaces were painted. And "alabaster stucco" (алебастровой штукатурки) also seems unlikely. We believe that the alabaster coating indicated clay wall plaster. If we take it literally, then it should be noted that in the Chuy Valley, there are only two known examples of alabaster wall plaster – in the residential building No. 2 at Krasnaya Rechka – dated to the Karakhanid period (Kozhemyako 1967, p. 73), and the decoration of the fourth mausoleum in the Burana ancient settlement (Goryacheva 2010, pp. 237–239, Fig. 148).

In concluding this description of the "central" chamber at the church of Ak-Beshim, it can be said that in the cross-section at the floor level, there is a step slightly lower (about 5–8 cm) than the passage floor, but it has the same level as floor of the courtyard. We also

see two marked burials on the plan – one directly at the southern face of the passage, and the second – in the southwest corner in front of the niche.

Behind the southern wall of the "central" chamber there is another room – a "lateral" chamber. Its outer eastern and southern walls' surfaces align with the corresponding walls, giving the entire chamber a "regular" rectangular form. Its only exit is located at the south wall, aligned with the wall of the courtyard. The internal dimensions of the room are 4.5×2.25 m (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 232).

Judging by the cross-section drawing of the "lateral" chamber, the eastern wall was made of *pakhsa* blocks, surviving in two rows to a height of 1.8 m (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 109.1). The rows of blocks were not separated by brick courses, and the division lines between the blocks do not coincide with the joints of the blocks and bricks on the eastern wall of the "central" room. This means that the eastern walls of the two adjacent rooms, despite the unity of the joint lines of the outer facades, were not integrated – one was built next to the other (Fig. 7.1).

In the "lateral" chamber there is a niche with a width of 0.8 m and a depth of 0.6–0.7 m shown on the plan in this eastern wall. The drawing of the elevation allows us to understand that it was made by carving into one of the *pakhsa* blocks of the second row. Note that the plan clearly shows that the depth of the wall [of this niche] is half of the thickness of the surrounding wall, i.e. the entire wall consisted of two rows of *pakhsa* blocks.

The southern wall of this "lateral" chamber on the plan is shown as thinner than the other walls of the building. According to the measurements it is 1 m wide. The northern wall, to the contrary, is the thickest part of the structure (like the other three walls of the "central" chamber) – if measuring the beginning of the large niche of the "central" chamber – it is 2 m thick. The plan also shows a niche with dimensions of 0.6×1 m, located at the northeast corner. Judging by the plan, its back wall is flush with the back wall of the small niche of the "central" chamber. This may be the boundary joint between of two rows of blocks constituting the wall thickness.

There is a *sufa* (bench) with a width of 1 m shown along the eastern wall of the "lateral" chamber, covering almost its entire width with a slight break from the southern wall (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 108). We assume that the break was caused by the partial removal of the *sufa* for burial 15, as shown on the earlier plan in the southeastern corner under (?) the eastern wall (Kyzlasov 2006, Fig. 110).

Along the northern wall, the plan shows brickwork with a thickness of 0.5 and a height of 2 rows, beginning at the *sufa* extending westwards for 2 m. Its southern face measures 0.55–0.6 m from the northern wall. This is probably the first coursework of a second [northern] *sufa*. Near the opposite wall there are two bricks next to each other with their headers touching. Their western edge aligns with the break of the wall masonry of the northern *sufa*. It is tempting to assume that these two bricks were pulled out of the eastern *sufa* during the burial.

The floor in the "lateral" chamber in the cross-section is shown to be 20. In the southernmost structure, Church A 25 cm above the floor in the "central" chamber, but at the same level as

the top of the platform within. At the same time, neither the northern niche, nor one of the *sufas*, nor the entrance to the burial is reflected in the section. Probably, the section shows not the floor of the "lateral" room itself, but the surface of the eastern *sufa* within it.

The original publication suggested the function of the "lateral" room – it served as the baptistry (Kyzlasov 1959, p. 232). We believe that for the baptismal ceremony, which implies a ritual of ambulatory movement around a font, there was not enough space – its width is not much more than two meters. It seems more likely to have been used as ministers' premises.

A critical analysis of the published visual materials with the detrimental laconic textual data suggests that the construction of this building – the Christian church – was not a one-time act. This is evidenced by a slightly different technique of wall construction and their thicknesses.

We assume that in the construction history of the site it is necessary to distinguish several periods. In the first phase, there was only a "central" chamber (and, possibly, some structures to the west of it, traced in the form of lines on the plan). It was entirely built of mudbricks with a wall thickness of about 1 m. Then, apparently, it was abandoned for some time, which led to deformation of the western brick wall facade as seen on the cross-section. When repairing (rebuilding or reconstructing) the church, the brick walls were cut at the same level 0.6 m from the floor, and the walls were then built of *pakhsa* blocks. In this case, the wall thickness is doubled due to the external wall construction, but only after that the walls of the courtyard were designed. The "lateral" chamber was built last: when it was constructed, the already formed outline of the courtyard and the "central" chamber were used. The difference in the construction of the courtyard and the "lateral" premises are evident, based on the different thicknesses of the southern walls and the different heights of the *pakhsa* blocks.

We are well aware of the weakness of the proposed argument about reconstruction of the architectural history of the building. [Further necessary] data – verbal, visual illustrations or photographic – about the stratigraphy could support or refute our assumptions. But in the published materials they are missing. This information is also missing in the textual part of the typewritten report.[10] It is hoped that they will be found in the archives of the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences or in the personal archive of Leonid Romanovich Kyzlasov.

Kyzlasov dated Area IV, as excavated by his team in 1954, to the 8th century. The basis for this dating was the forms and artifacts found there belonging to the Turgesh period and the "circle of the Turgesh": i.e. Tukhus and Chinese coins, construction techniques and materials, scanty ceramic finds (Fig. 8) and, to a lesser extent, the architectural and planning comparisons (Kyzlasov 1959, pp. 231–233, 241). At the end of the 1980s A. M. Vysotsky reexamined this monument. Based on the data of the first publications, he reflected on the material in a complete and systematic manner and, therefore, shifted the emphasis to architectural parallels; he

[10] An illustrative part of the Kyrgyz copy of the report has been lost.

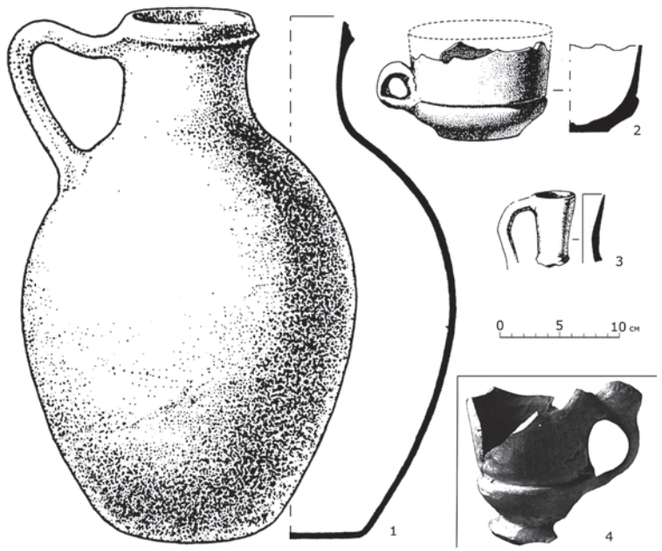

Fig. 8. Ceramics "used for funerary services", found during excavations of the church and cemetery in 1954 (by: Kyzlasov 2006)

dated the monument to a somewhat earlier time – the mid-7th – early 8th centuries (Vysotsky 1989). At the same time A. M. Vysotsky did not consider the artifacts at the site, including numismatic evidence. Such an amendment to the date has been adopted by some researchers (Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994, p. 86). When re-editing his interpretation, L. R. Kyzlasov considered that such a change [in dating made by later scholars] was done "without any serious arguments" (Kyzlasov 2006, p. 322, note 198).

We recognize that the discovered coins only provide the earliest date of the possible construction of the structure [terminus post quem], but not the latest possible date [terminus ante quem]! It is well known that coins of the Turgesh and the Turgesh circle on the sites of the Chuy Valley are also found in later Karakhanid-period strata; these earlier coins are found more often than Karakhanid *fals* and *dirhams*. So, it is more correct to say that the church was built no earlier than the third quarter of the 8th century – on the basis of the Chinese coin of Qian-Yuan Zhung-Bao, issued in 758–762, that was found within. Looking ahead, we will say that since most of the relatively reliably dated Christian monuments of Kyrgyzstan are dated to no earlier than Karakhanid period, we can assume that this church was built at the beginning of the second millennium.

The complex of Christian churches of the ancient Ak-Beshim settlement – known as Area VIII – was identified at the southeast corner of shahristan-1 (Fig. 9). It was investigated in the years 1997–1998 and 2000–2001, but remained completely uncovered. In 2004–2006, it was partially covered with backfill using materials of the excavated area.

There is no need to provide a detailed description of this excavation, as in the previous case, since there is already a substantial published archaeological report that covered most of the work (Semenov 2002). But, because we were participants in these works, we have our own observations and conclusions regarding several issues.

Area VIII consists of four adjacent churches (A – D) with one single eastern façade. Residential premises were located to the northwestern of this excavated space. The total

dimensions of the interior sanctuaries are 60×45 m (Fig. 10). Remains of the structure are substantial – the height of the walls ranges from 1.0 to 3.5–4.0 m (Fig. 11). In some areas the vaults were partially preserved (Fig. 12), as well as the arches of the niches and passages (Fig. 13).

Each church consists of a central/altar chamber at the east end, and a nave or an open courtyard in front of it to the west, connected by a passage on the central axis. On the opposite side of the entrance, in all four cases there was a niche in the altar chamber, from which protruded a low platform-altar.

In the southernmost structure, Church A, around the altar chamber there are side corridors, divided by passages into three sections, and these bypass the central areas. At a later phase, this room was turned into a winery and wine-storage area – *khum-khona* (Fig. 15). Continuing from the side corridors and parallel to the central nave, covered by a series of domes (?), there were long side aisles with vaulted ceilings. They led into the nave by two passages in the north and south walls. The three aisles were connected at the western end by one long chamber, which can be interpreted as a transept. There were no bypass corridors, side aisles, and transepts in the other three remaining churches;

Fig. 9. Complex of Christian churches (Area VIII) of the Ancient Ak-Beshim settlement, aerial photograph of 2005

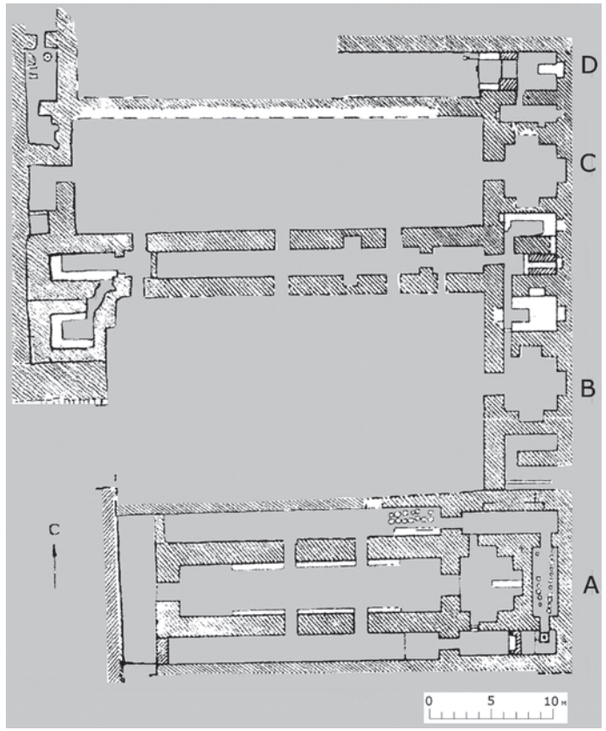

Fig. 10. Plan of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII). Ak Beshim

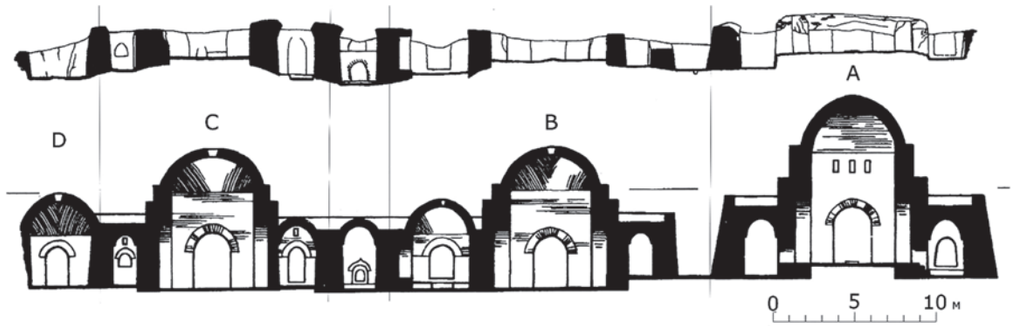

Fig. 11. Architectural section through the altar premises of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII) of the Ancient Ak-Beshim settlement and its graphic reconstruction (Semenov 2002)

however, there are rooms flanking the altar chambers in churches B and C. In Church D, the northernmost and smallest exit from the altar chamber was decorated with steps; where there was found a charred beam on the floor (Fig. 14). The walls of the rooms were painted with adhesive pigments (Fig. 16); and gold was used in the decor of the altar room of Church C, consisting of small pieces of the finest foil.

The Christian identification of the monument, determined in the course of the 1998 field survey was "confirmed, in addition to the layout, by the finds of several Nestorian crosses, as well as Syriac inscriptions" (Semenov 1999, pp. 73–74). This refers to images on three fragments of terracotta plaques (tiles) (Fig. 17), one of which is part of a seal matrix, and small objects of unbaked clay (Fig. 18) (Semenov 1999, Photo 5). Crosses on these objects have a vertical board with the lower portion elongated; all their arms flare outwards, terminating in two "drops"; and the entire cross is placed on a two-step pedestal (indicating Golgotha – ?). Several similar objects were found in 2000–2001. In comparison the bronze cross, "accidentally" found at the site by amateur excavators, has Sogdian inscriptions at the ends of its arms and a similar design (Klein and Reck 2004; Semenov 1999, Photo 5.4). And the horizontal part of the relatively large bronze cross, apparently for processional use found in 2000, also has flaring arms, but terminating

Fig. 12. Arch of the niche arch in Room 24 within the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII). Ak Beshim

Fig. 13. Passage between the Rooms 31 and 32 of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII), Ak Beshim

Fig. 14. Charred beam of the threshold at Church D of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII). Ak Beshim

with three drops (Semenov 1999, Photo 5.5). On one object made of unburnt clay – probably part of an interior decoration detail – there is an equal-arm cross with flaring ends without drops. On another example, there is an equal-arm cross formed by the intersection of two straight lines drawn along the clay (Fig. 18). Therefore, the discovery of such a number of crosses undoubtedly places the Area VIII monument into the Christian category, but it seems incorrect to call all the crosses found there, which consists of different types, as exclusively "Nestorian".

As for the "Syriac inscriptions," one belonged to a manuscript fragment that had several pages stuck together and conserved in the field (Figs. 19 and 20), and another inscription was found on the back of a ceramic plaque (Fig. 17.2). It must be said that photographs taken in the field were of high quality (given the fact that they were shot in the era prior to digital cameras!), but that a language specialist (Syriacist or Semiticist) was absent among the excavation team, and so any conclusion about the language and even the script could only have been hypothetical.

Nevertheless, the Syriacist V. Klein, who examined the photograph of the plaque inscription, agreed that the letters are in Syriac, but he could not translate them.

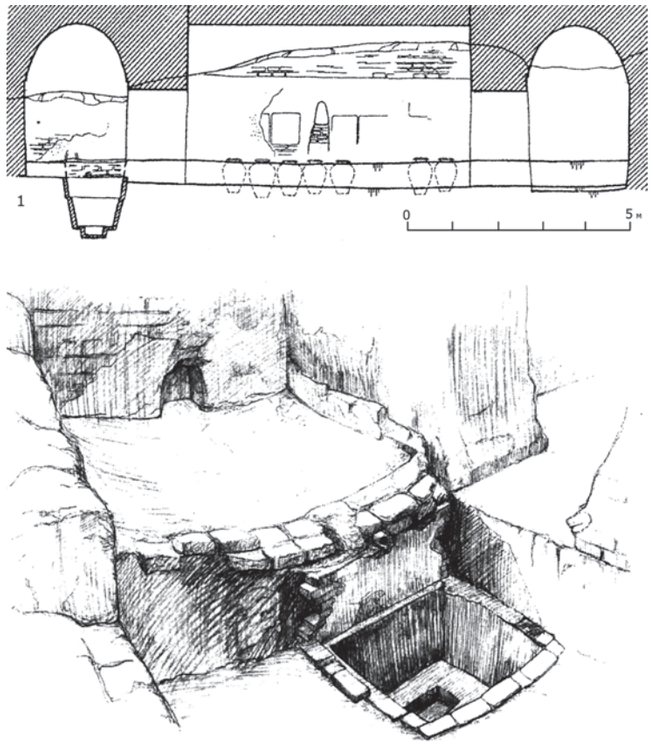

Fig. 15. Winery and khum-khona in the Church A of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII) of the ancient Ak-Beshim settlement: 1 – architectural section with elements of reconstruction through the eastern corridor and adjacent parts of the north (right) and south (left); 2 – graphic drawing of the excavated room-winery (Semenov 2002)

The dating of the entire complex was based on the enamel (glazed) ceramics found on the floors and a few poorly preserved coins with characteristics of the Karakhanid period (while there was predominance of Turgesh and Tuhsi coins) on the floors and within the infilling of the rooms. However, this does not exclude an earlier dating of the complex or its individual areas – since the underlying stratigraphic layers beneath the floor were not studied.

Thus, with the stated reservations, we agree with G. L. Semenov on the dating of Area VIII at the site of Ak-Beshim and its attribution to Christianity; we also consider the Nestorian identification of the complex to be possible, but unproven given the investigated excavation materials.

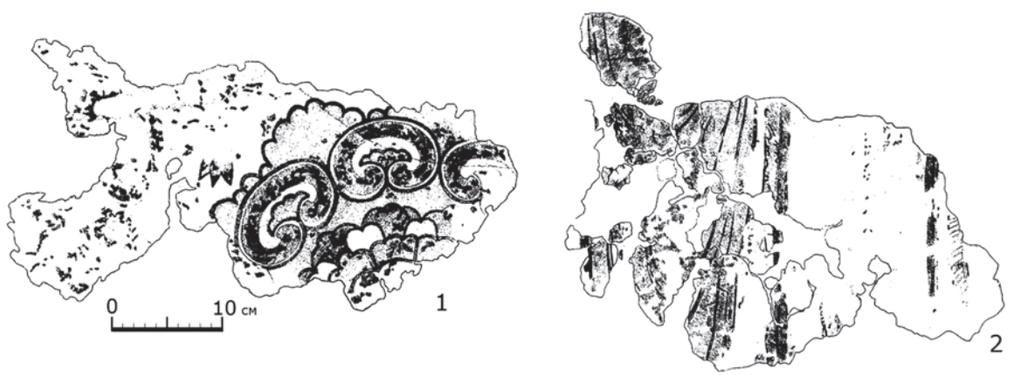

Fig. 16. Drawings of extant fragments of wall paintings from the Church A of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII) of the ancient Ak-Beshim settlement (Semenov 2002)

depending on the season. All juveniles, except two, had their lower arms bent at a 45-degree angle with their hands clasped together, just placed above their waist (Fig. 8).

Most of these graves did not contain any artifacts apart from a few ceramic shards and animal bones which were part of the soil fill. There were a few graves that contained accessories, including small micro-sized glass-paste beads, as parts of necklaces and/or bracelets or, in some cases, perhaps sewn onto clothing. One child had a very intricate turquois-bead-and-bird-bone necklace. Another child of perhaps five years of age had a silver ring with a raised, uninscribed bezel. Other tombs contained bronze or copper earrings. In several examples, smooth river stones ranging in size between five and 10 cm were placed either in the hand or at one or both elbows (Fig. 8). In addition, some of the graves were accompanied by ash pits containing animal bones (mostly sheep or goat) and courseware sherds. We theorize that this indicates some form of communal meal accompanied the funerary rites.

Exploration of the cemetery continued during the 2019-expedition season. As our excavation moved northwards, we began to uncover more adult graves. These provided us a better opportunity to examine the stages of burial construction and, where possible, discern the relationship between the graves both spatially and temporarily; in other words, differences in grave construction could indicate chronological phasing. Once again, we looked to the similar burials in Kyrgyzstan, as recorded by Nicholai Pantusov; he observed that children's graves rested on average 0.70 to 1.15 m below the surface, whereas adult graves were deeper at 1.6 to 2 meters below the surface (Pantusov 1886). So, again, it seemed plausible that by digging deeper, we might locate older burials, and if so, this would allow us to plot a relative chronology, charting how the cemetery developed over time.

Returning to the same location as the previous season, we began removing the soil in 10 cm intervals in the northern sector of Area C. Following an overnight rain shower, the soil then clearly revealed grave shafts, often accompanied by mudbrick, which became more discernable in wet soil. This led to the Archaeological Expertise team to develop a new technique using a sprayer to gently mist a thin layer of soil to assist in detecting differences in soil density. Eventually, 45 more graves were excavated, but well over 100 more still remain just within the

Fig. 8. Detail of grave (shown above in figure Fig. 4). Excavation of juvenile grave (2018) with closeup of small river stone placed at elbow at Ucharal-Ilibalyk (Photo: L. Flowers)

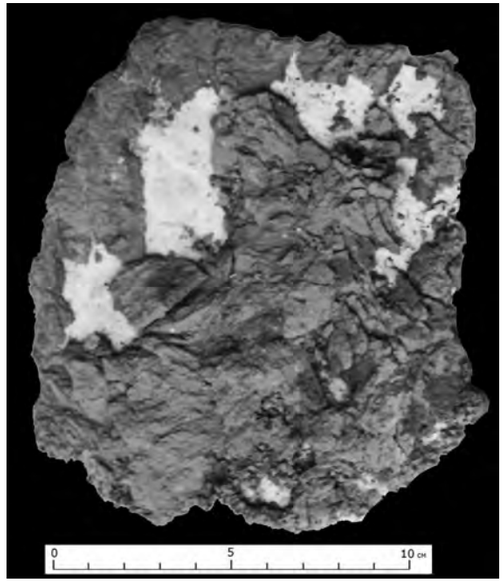

Fig. 19. Fragment of a manuscript folio discovered during excavation of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII). Ak Beshim

Fig. 20. Leather cover of a book discovered during the excavation of the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII). Ak Beshim

Buildings of Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) cemetery. As mentioned above, on the plans of the Peri-Pishpek cemetery, compiled during the research of 1886, indicated that there were two small structures (Fig. 21). N. N. Pantusov wrote this about them:

> From the traces of the buildings, there are two similar ruined chapels or churches consisting, apparently, of one almost square-shaped room (as indicated by the remains of wall-foundations) and attached… to the side… of an extension as if indicating the shape of the altar. ... Then, however, during excavations, it turned out that these extensions, like an altar, constituted the place of the tombs. ... These places were surrounded by walls: foundations, which consists of large squares, are the remains of a wall or embankment adjacent to the tomb and probably constituted a spare place for other family members or gardens (Pantusov 1888, l. 42-a).

From the textual and visual documentation at our disposal, we can extract some factual information about these architectural forms. "Tomb No. 1" was located in the northwest corner of the uncovered part of the cemetery. It was oriented with its corners at the cardinal points of the compass (with slight deviations) (Fig. 22). As can be seen in the illustrations and as described in the text, it was rectangular structure with a wall length of 12.8 m with a protrusion in the middle of the southeastern wall.[11] This protrusion, measuring 5.3 m

[11] These numbers (and those afterwards) are based on the original measurements that were provided by Pantusov according the old Russian imperial system of units.

in length and width, was described by the following words: "a semicircle or the same but smaller square, which, when destroyed, took on a shape more similar to a semicircle". The structure was outlined by external features and was not excavated. Around this site there was a ditch, from where soil was taken for use in constructing the walls within, according to N. N. Pantusov (1886, l. 2-a, b).

"Tomb No. 2" is marked on the plan as the northernmost identified feature of the cemetery. It is approximately oriented to the cardinal points of the compass (Fig. 23). Its dimensions were recorded beside the sketched plan in his journal: its north and south walls measured 18.1 m in length; the east was 17.8 m; and the west wall was 13.85 m. A narrow passage was shown in the middle of the eastern wall. In the middle of the western side, the structure had a latitudinally oriented protruding chamber with dimensions (according to different measurements) of 5.3×6 m. The floor within it rose above the rest of the construction's [floor level]. In the middle of this chamber there was a hollow as shown on the plan. According to other notes, the chamber was supposed to have a rounded outline (which was shown on the general plan) (Pantusov 1886, l. 30-a).

The western part was excavated. The walls were uncovered "from the sides" and they consisted of "partly mud brick, partly raw brick", measuring more than 60 cm high, and in plan they had a rectangular form, and remains of earthen plaster were also discovered on them.

At a depth of 0.6–0.7 m from the ground surface of the building there were scattered fired bricks of "different sizes". At the same level in the middle there was found a "stone boulder with St. Andrew's Cross", its dimensions were 58×45 cm.

Along the northern and southern walls there were three burials identified and studied, which provided the defining evidence leading to the final interpretation of the building as a burial vault or mausoleum (Pantusov 1886, l.30-b – 31-a). In addition, the archival materials show ground plans dated to the year 1886, containing another ten marked hills (Fig. 21), three of which (A, B and C) were excavated, and under two of them – A and C – there were recorded structural remains. It is logical to assume that under the third excavated hill – B – there were remains of walls that were left either outside the boundaries of the excavation, or were not recorded.

"Hill A" was located 115 m east of the "Tomb No. 1" (Fig. 24). It was about 10 m in diameter and 0.9 m in height. There was a depression at the top surface (Pantusov 1886, l. 16-a) (Fig. 24.2). From this hill to the north-east and north-west, at an insignificant distance there were three more hills of slightly smaller size, and to the southeast at around fifty meters stood – "Hill B".

The excavations of "Hill A" revealed a structure with a rectangular outline, which was oriented to the cardinal points, with dimensions of 3.15×2.45 m (Fig. 24.3). Two burials were recorded inside it; over them there was found one stone with a cross (two additional burials were identified under the hill's surface). The extant height of the "earthen" walls was

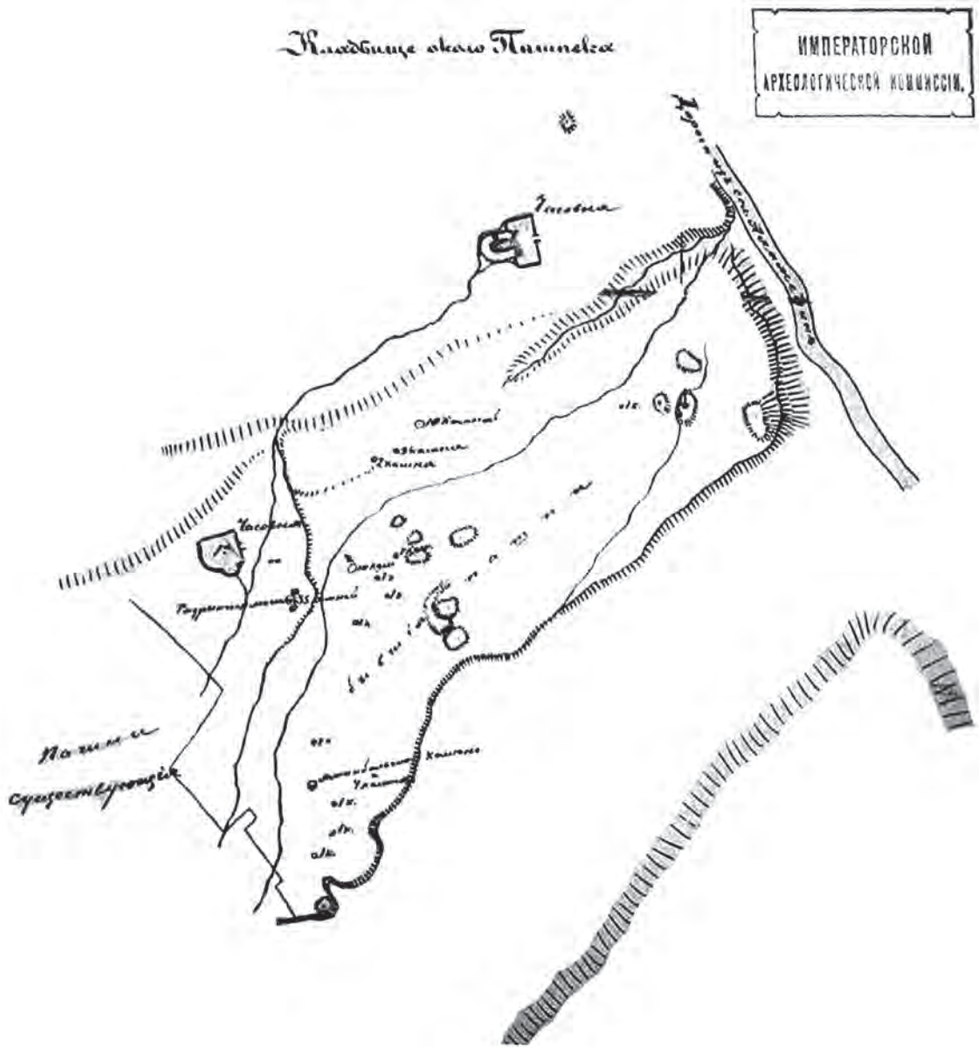

Fig. 21. Plan of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery 1886 (Pantusov 1888)

not directly indicated. However, based on the cross-section drawings (Figs. 24.2 and 24.4) and the provided measurements from the surface to the top of the covering of one of the graves, the walls survived to a height of up to 0.9 m; i.e. the height of the hill was equal to the height of the walls of the "fence".

Passages within this structure were not identified. But in the description and in the illustration, it is indicated that at the northern end of the eastern wall there was a round hole covered with sand and small rocks (Pantusov 1886, l. 16-a –17-a). Judging by the figure (Fig. 24.3), it was so small that a person could hardly crawl into it, and so assuming it was

used as a passage-entrance seems to be incorrect.[12]

"Hill C" was situated in the middle of the eastern group of four hills and was located 120-125 m south-east of the "Tomb No. 2" (Fig. 21). It had a large size: a diameter of 14 m and a height of 1.4 m. At the top there was a depression described as "the surface of which is rather square than round". This was conditioned by the presence of an almost square structure within it (4.44×4.31 m), its walls were placed "on the walls of a pit carved in the ground" (Fig. 25). A passage was in the middle of the eastern wall (Pantusov 1886, l. 18-a – 18-b). "A stone with the image of a cross without an inscription" was found within it on the floor surface (Fig. 26.1).

The structure was made of mudbrick. It survived almost to the height of the hill. Based on the cross-section drawing, the walls were laid in 1.5 bricks with alternating rows (Fig. 25.2). The walls' surfaces were "plastered with lime" and painted. In a brick debris area, measured at a depth of 3.4 m, there were "blocks of mudbricks, plastered with alabaster and painted with black and red colors".

Two [engaged] half-columns were found here – "i.e. as a column, split lengthwise – made of clay, plastered with alabaster and there are hardly noticeable a few drawings rendered by black and red paints on it". Moreover, they were found at a depth of 2.15 m from the surface

Fig. 22. Schematic layout of the "Tomb No. 1" of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery. Detail from the general plan of 1886 (Pantusov 1888)

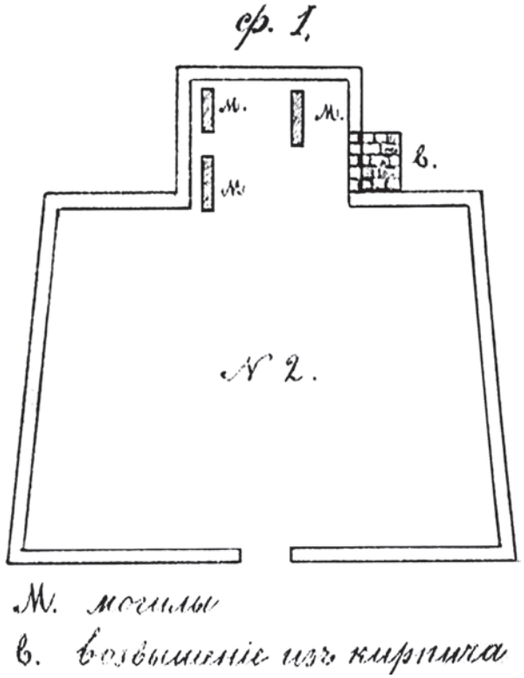

Fig. 23. Layout of the "Tomb No. 2" of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery. 1886 year (Pantusov 1886)

[12] However, in somewhat earlier Zoroastrian *nausas* / fences on the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement and north of the village of Novo-Pokrovskoye, the entrance-manholes were roughly the same (cf.: (Goryacheva 2010; Kolchenko 2005. p. 270, etc.]).

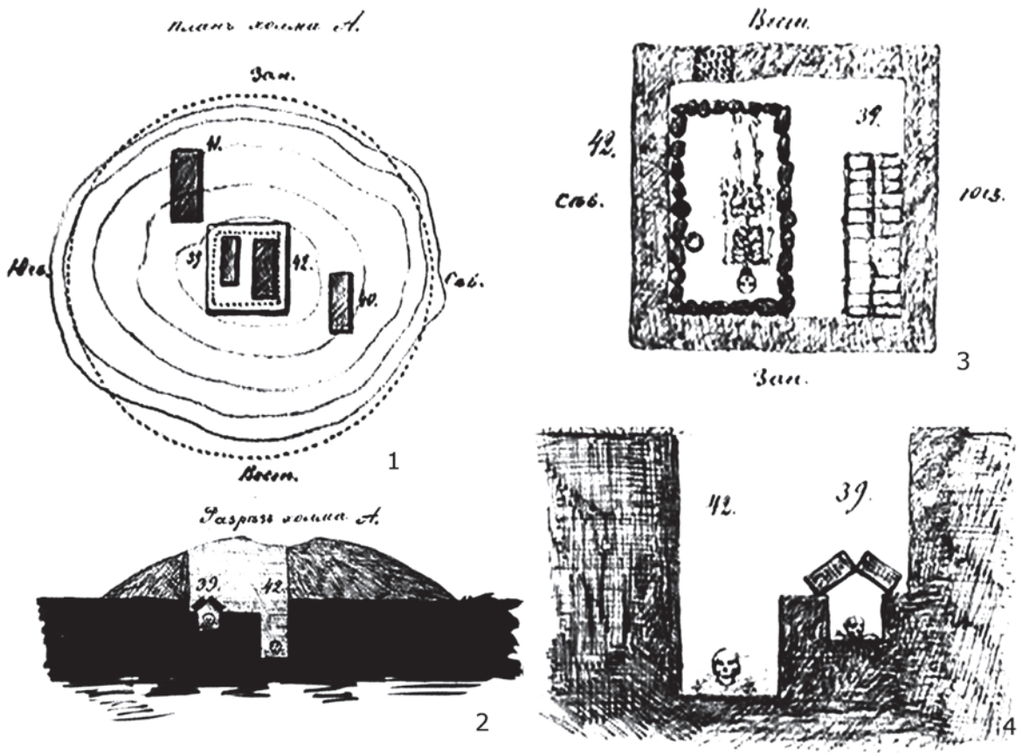

Fig. 24. "Hill A" of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery: 1 – layout; 2 – section; 3 – layout of the identified structures with burials 39 and 42; 4 – section of burials 39 and 42. 1886 (by: Pantusov 1886)

of the hill in the middle part and at a depth of 3.38 m closer to the northwestern corner. The fragments were about 0.8 m long, with diameters at the ends of 30 and 40 cm (Pantusov 1886, l.19-b – 20-a).

At the upper part of the fence walls – at a depth of 1.25 cm from the surface of the hill – there were ash, coals and fire-calcinated earth revealed in the northern sector, and pieces of wood in the southern sector at the same depth. Also in the fence walls, to a depth of 1.4 m, there were "pieces of ornamentation of a building made of fired bricks" (Pantusov 1886, l. 19-a). They probably belonged to the exterior decoration.

Three burials were excavated inside this structure (Pantusov 1886, l. 19-a–21-a): (a) a body placed in a wooden coffin, (b) a body placed in a sit-down position in "cubic box" with its face looking south, and (c) a body sitting with accompanying accessories in a wooden coffin facing east. The second example was accompanied by a stone with the image of a cross, but without inscriptions (Fig. 26.2).

Pantusov summarized this in his journal: "This fence was nothing more than a mausoleum, decorated inside with columns and colored with paints. This mausoleum was probably built

over the dust of a leader and then collapsed. Afterwards this place was no longer used as a mausoleum and the corpse No. 43-b was buried here in a box. This is proved by the fact that this box, or a coffin of a cubic shape, was surrounded by debris from the ruins of the mausoleum. Also, judging by the amount of ash and the thickness of the burned surface of the debris filling the fence, or the inner space of the mausoleum, there probably were sacrifices (Pantusov 1886, l.18-a–21-a).

It seems to us that a different interpretation of the above burial is possible. It was a building (mausoleum/tomb) with wall paintings in the interior and an external relief decoration made of fired bricks, which had a wooden ceiling that rested on two half-columns; it was built over a common burial ground, which was probably open, where three wooden coffins laid below the original ground surface. The destruction of the building was followed by a fire.

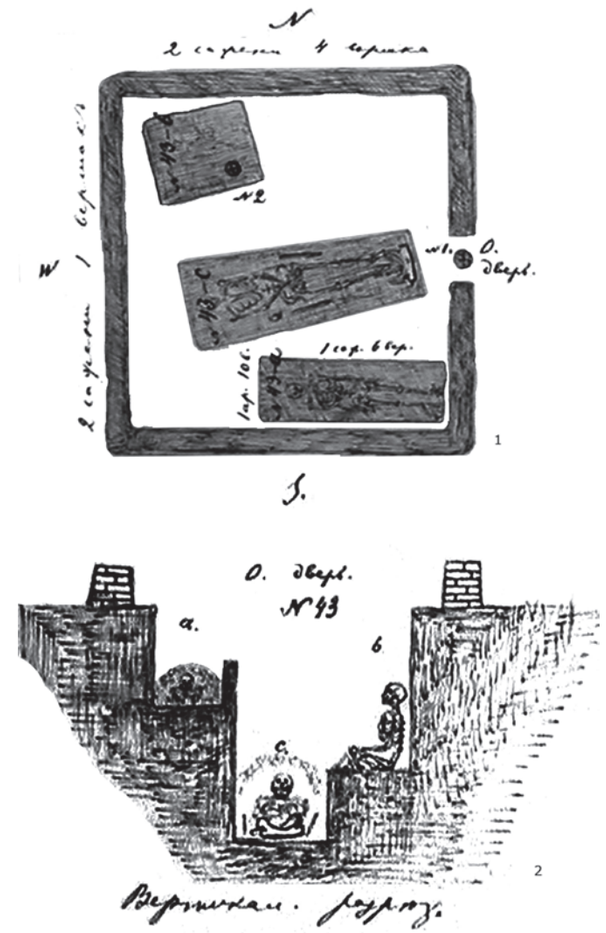

Fig. 25. Structure with burials in the "Hill C" of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemeteries: 1 – layout; 2 – section (Pantusov 1886)

We should emphasize that the structures of the Peri-Pishpek Christian cemetery described above are poorly represented in the documentation that is available. And there is no hope of new substantial data being added to the archival materials. Future field studies of this site are also unlikely – since the territory of the cemetery (and the village as a whole) over the past 130 years has been completely changed by economic activity, which included leveling all of the hills, land contours, and ravines. Therefore, the architectural conception of these buildings described below is necessarily conditional and hypothetical.

Functionally, the structures were held in common – they were funerary edifices for 2 to 4 people. Their spaces were quite intimate (from 2.45 to 6 m) and their designs were,

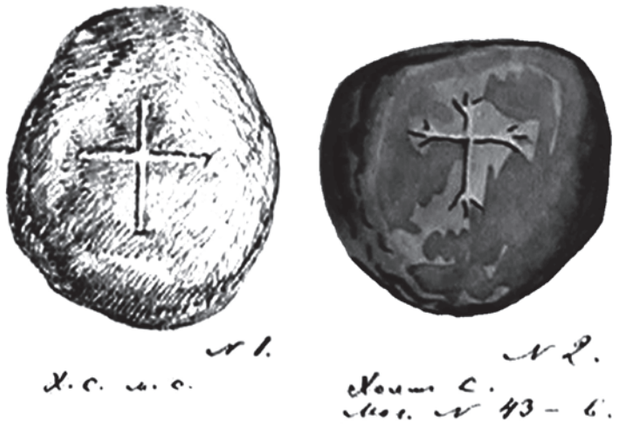

Fig. 26. Drawings of stones with images of crosses found during excavations of the "Hill C" of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery: 1 – from the passage; ink; 2 – from burial No. 43-s; watercolor (Pantusov 1886)

presumably, conditioned by the available technologies and building materials of that time, primarily in the construction of the roof. Based on the available data on the construction of Hill C, the roofs were timber, more precisely – with wood/poles, frames, and gables. Judging by the thickness of the walls and the recorded elevations, the buildings were relatively modest in height.

Table 1. Some data on the architectural objects of the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) medieval cemetery

	Dimensions	Entrance direction / Open side	Quantity of buried
Tomb №1	5,3×5,3 m 12,8×12,8 m – yard	South-West	?
Tomb №2	5,3×6 m 18,1×17,8×18,1×13,85 m – yard	East	3
Structure in the Hill A	3,15×2,45 m	No	2
Structure in the Hill C	4,44×4,31 m	East	3

An expert in field research will notice two forms which can be identified typologically (without formal emphasis): (1) mausoleums with enclosed spaces in front of them and (2) cubic mausoleums, somewhat smaller in size. [13] If parallel examples for the second are very numerous, then for the first type they are not so common.

The dating of the Peri-Pishpek structures should be generalized and based on the dates of graves from this cemetery belonging to the 13th–14th centuries.

[13] Of course, it cannot be excluded that these were really only "fences", similar to those that are known in later ethnographic descriptions.

Cemeteries. Gravestones

At different times, medieval Christian cemeteries and individual gravestones in the Chuy Valley were discovered on the sites of Krasnaya Rechka, Ak-Beshim and Burana, Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) village, as well as around lake Issyk-Kul, and the Juuka River valley between the villages of Saruu and Darkhan.

Funerary artifacts of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement. The single-person grave burials at the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement were discovered at different times and in different places. M. E. Masson reported that in 1919 somewhere near the village there were found several Christian kairaks (Masson 1978). However, this was all the information he reported about them. Then, in 1938, "among the remains of a Muslim cemetery" in the southwestern part of the settlement, there was uncovered a fragment of fired brick with an image of a cross and a Syro-Turkic inscription (Fig. 3) (Bernshtam 1941, pp. 74, 107; Borisov 1963, pp. 56–57). In 1980, during the excavation of the upper top layer of the citadel within the basement, there were found two more kairaks with epitaphs (Goryacheva 1988, pp. 62–66; Goryacheva, Peregudova 1994, pp. 93–94). And finally, in the 2010s, four fragments of kairaks were accidentally found in the *rabad* near the eastern section of the city walls, which were transferred to the museum of KRSU for storage. In addition, V.D. Goryacheva wrote that upon the vertebrae of one buried individuals in the city necropolis (Excavation 3) there was found a pectoral cross (Fig. 27) (Goryacheva 1988, p. 67); it was a pit burial, once covered by "large rectangular mudbricks" forming a vault. Such a geographical spread of artifacts does not allow us to describe the Christian cemeteries completely, but it does allow us to assert that a significant community of Christians lived at the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement, some of which were buried at the necropolis that was common to the entire city. The latest discovery of kairaks provides hope that the Christian cemetery will nevertheless be found at the eastern end of the city walls. One additional piece of evidence, that further leads researchers to this hypothesis regarding Krasnaya Rechka, is the small fragment of a ceramic vessel with the image of an equilateral cross drawn on it before firing that was found there (Fig. 28), which is similar to the Ak-Beshim ceramic vessel from Area III (Fig. 4.1).

The chronology of the Christian artifacts at Krasnaya Rechka is debatable. For example, researchers dated the fragment of a brick-epitaph to the second half of the 11th–12th centuries; proceeding, first of all, from the fact that it was found among Muslim burials of this time period and, to a lesser extent, due to the peculiarities of the lettering, which "are very close to the letters of the bulk of the Semirechye gravestones" (Borisov 1963, pp. 56–57; Bernshtam 1941, p. 107). That is, the grounds for dating it were quite meager. The pectoral cross from the excavation site was dated back to the mid-8th century, although there were no other finds in the burial (Goryacheva 1988, pp. 66–68), and the issues of stratigraphy and, as a consequence, dating of the necropolis as a whole were far from adequately solved. That is, the published chronology was unproven. The dates inscribed on kairaks from the citadel,

Fig. 27. Pectoral cross from a female burial in the necropolis of Krasnaya Rechka

Fig. 28. Image of a cross on a fragment of a ceramic vessel. Accidental find of 2004. Krasnaya Rechka-2

based on squeezes and photographs of A. V. Paikova, were interpreted as very early dates – 1100/789 and 1220/909 (Goryacheva 1988, pp. 64–65). However, a quarter of a century later, V. Klein, working directly with the stones, interpreted other reckonings – 1426 / 1114–1115 and 1606/1295 which seems typologically more reasonable (Klein 2000, pp. 163–165).

Ak-Beshim, burial site at Area IV. Around and inside the Christian church of Ak-Beshim, there were uncovered eighteen burials with a west-east orientation and five in a north-south orientation (Fig. 6). The second group were interpreted as later Muslim burials that were deposited when the structure had been destroyed and a hill had formed over it. Burials with a western orientation "dating back to the same time", i.e. synchronous to the church itself, were defined as Christian (Kyzlasov 1959, pp. 131–133; Kyzlasov 2006, pp. 322, 329). Probably, if the excavation expanded over the entire courtyard, the number of identified burials would increase, and if excavations were conducted beyond the architecture.

The director of the excavation noted three types of uncovered Christian burials: (1) pits with brick lining along their walls and covered by similar bricks "in the form of a gable roof"; (2) pits with a lining in the southern wall; and (3) pits carved under the wall of the building with their entrances blocked by bricks at their western ends. Based on the images of the burials on the ground plan, this data can be further described (Fig. 29).

Four burials belonging to type 1 were found. Moreover, two of them were in the central (altar) chamber and, judging by the dashed outline of the pit, their walls were not lined with brick (Fig. 29.12 and 14). Two other burials of this type were located to the east among the majority of the burials. Proceeding, again, from the data of the ground plan, it can be supposed that one more example of this type – No. 7 – was not lined by bricks (Fig. 29.7). Therefore, only the burial No. 1 corresponded to what Kyzlasov described as type 1 (Fig. 29.1). Thus,

the construction of a pit burial surrounded by a brick wall was only a variation of type 1, which in general, must be defined as a simple pit burial.

The burials of type 2 are the most numerous – there are ten of them. As described in the publication, the shaft was dug and at its southern side a chamber was carved to hold the body, and in only one case (No. 6) the body was laid on the north side of the pit. In one example – No. 11 – it was shown that the entrance to the chamber was lined with regular brickwork. There is no additional information on how the entrance to the other burials were blocked. There is also a lack of information about the correlation of the levels, particularly between the bottom of the pit's entrance and the chamber's floor. Geographically the burials of this type were located under the walls – outside the sanctuary (Nos. 4 and 9) and within courtyard wall (No. 11), and within the passage (from the courtyard into the sanctuary), as well as outside in the cemetery to the east of the sanctuary. [14]

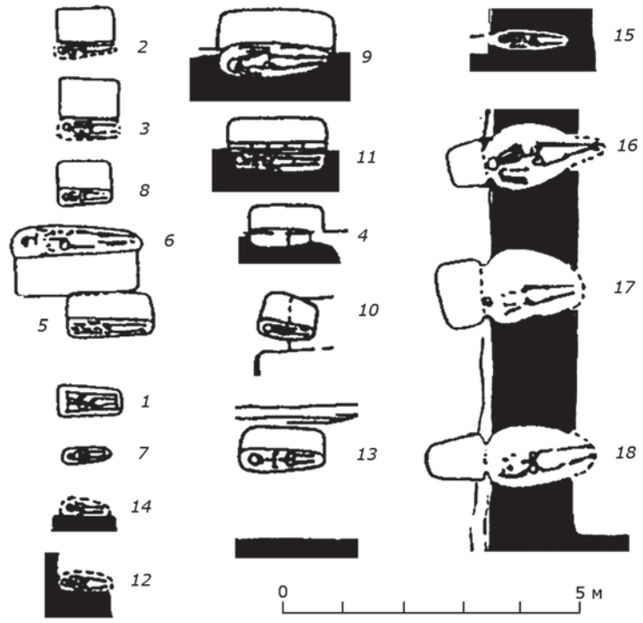

Fig. 29. Table of burials found during excavations of Area IV (Christian Church) of the ancient settlement of Ak-Beshim in 1954. Numbers in the table match the numbers on the plan (according to the ground plan of the site; Kyzlasov 1959)

Finally, type 3 burials – were chambers carved under the walls of the church and their entrances were at their western side. Three of these were inserted under the western wall of the church's exterior (Fig. 29.16–18), and one more within the interior – under the eastern wall of the "lateral" chamber (Fig. 29.15), i.e. within the wall itself. If in the first cases these burial chambers, according to the ground plan, appear relatively spacious, then in the last example, it was quite narrow. Entrances to these burial chambers were blocked by neatly laid mud bricks (Fig. 30).

As can be clearly seen on the plan, most of the burials were placed on the exterior of the building and only a third of them are on the inside. There is no apparent pattern of those in the interior, except for their placement along the walls. But most (seven) of the external

[14] The location of burial No 4 disproves the very possibility of the existence of a wall [for a northern lateral chamber] north of the central/altar chamber.

Fig. 30. Blocked entrances to the chambers of burials under the wall of the Christian church at the site of Ak-Beshim: 1 – grave 17; 2 – grave 18 (Kyzlasov 2006)

burials are concentrated on the eastern side – five graves form an almost even row. A group of three burials on the western side of the church also appear quite systematically placed. Note that there were definitely no doorways on the western wall, so the graves would not have interfered with movement into the courtyard. This suggests that the cemetery began to be formed while the site still functioned. However, the burials inside could have been interred after the building was abandoned – it can be assumed that the Christian community of Ak-Beshim continued to possess its territory and decided to use it as a cemetery after the church no longer functioned as such. V. Klein suggested that its liturgical cessation could be associated with the construction of a new, more spacious sanctuary – Church A of the Area VIII (Klein 2000, p. 256). If so, this would have happened during the 10th–11th centuries.

The size of the graves should also be noted. Exactly half of them, based on the scale of the plan, do not exceed one meter in length. And this means that many of those buried therein died in childhood or adolescence.

Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) cemetery. As stated in the historiographical section above, investigations at Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach cemetery) were carried out in 1885–1886: thirty-five burials were excavated during the first year, and eighty-five more in the second. The report, which included a number of pictures and drawings, as well as a journal, were submitted to the Archaeological Commission. For our further descriptions, we base it on the materials contained in archive of the Institute of History of Material Culture (IHMC) (ИИМК РАН, St. Petersburg) where the "Descriptions ..." and "Journal ..." are located (Pantusov 1886; Pantusov 1888).

The Peri-Pishpek cemetery was located in the foothills "three versts" (~ 3,200 km) north of the Kyrgyz (old Aleksandrovsky) ridge "to the right (west) of the nomadic road leading from the village of Alamedina to the mountain gorge of Kenter or Nauruz; between the large

irrigation canals (*aryks*) Jelair (from the north-west) and Aksak-Byuri (from the southeast)". It stretched from the southwest to the northeast measuring a "quarter of a vert" (266.7 m) from the right bank of the Jelair canal. Researchers determined its size as "approximately in 3 dessiatins" (3.278 ha) (Fig. 21). The criteria for determining these dimensions is unclear, since there were no visual boundaries "in the form of a wall, ramparts or something similar"; instead they were able to identify the "gravestones in the form of rocks," part of which "being immersed to their complete height, and others even deeper into the ground, correctly indicated where the heads were located of those buried in their respective graves" (IHMC Archive, Case No. 40–b, l. 46).

According to N. N. Pantusov and A. M. Fetisov, the surface of the cemetery retained "faint hints of rows of graves eroded over a millennium ago," which were located "more or less correctly in a line from south to north". They also noted the presence of some of the architectural forms described above.

The research revealed the fact that on the surface of these graves, in separate areas of the cemetery, there were stone fences, elongated in the latitudinal direction, and individual stones with epitaphs were installed at their western end (Fig. 31) (cf. with earlier Turkic stone fences and the location of their stone sculptures). In other cases, a continuous rectangular grave covering was constructed using bricks in 2–3 rows (Fig. 32), and at the western side a commemorative inscription was placed vertically. But most had only a small earthen hill, almost completely leveled by natural processes at the time of investigation.

There was a variety of types that the graves (i.e. underground structures) could take. The first of them is characterized by a chamber on the northern side or on both sides of the

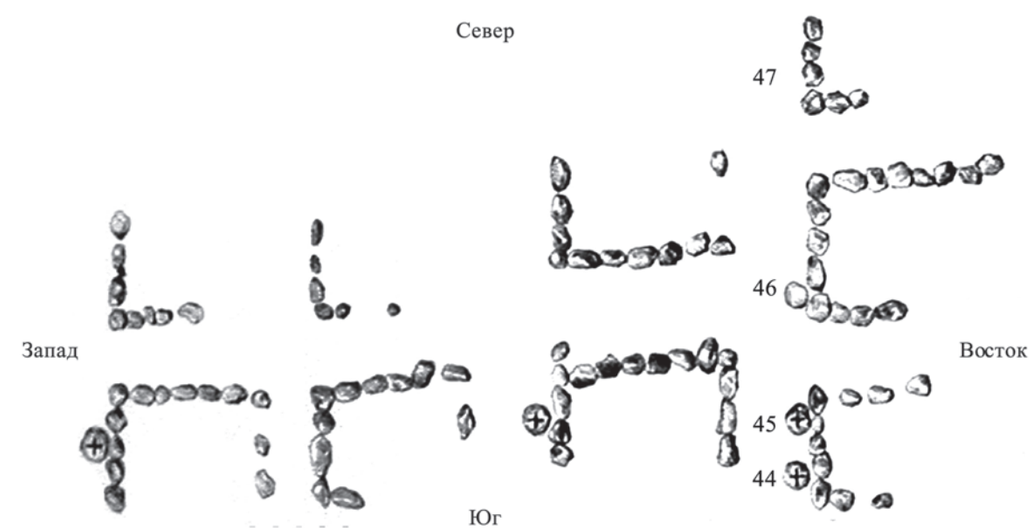

Fig. 31. Stone fences of a group of burials in the northern part of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery. 1886 (Pantusov 1886)

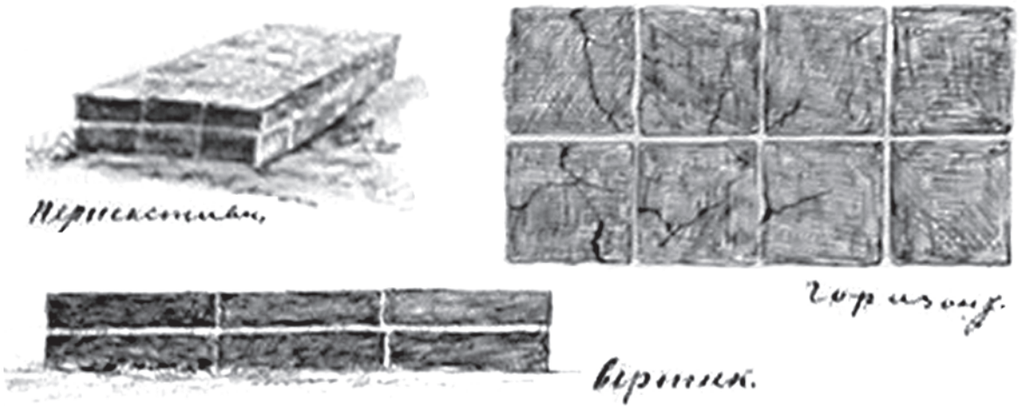

Fig. 32. Grave coverings of some burials of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery (Pantusov 1886)

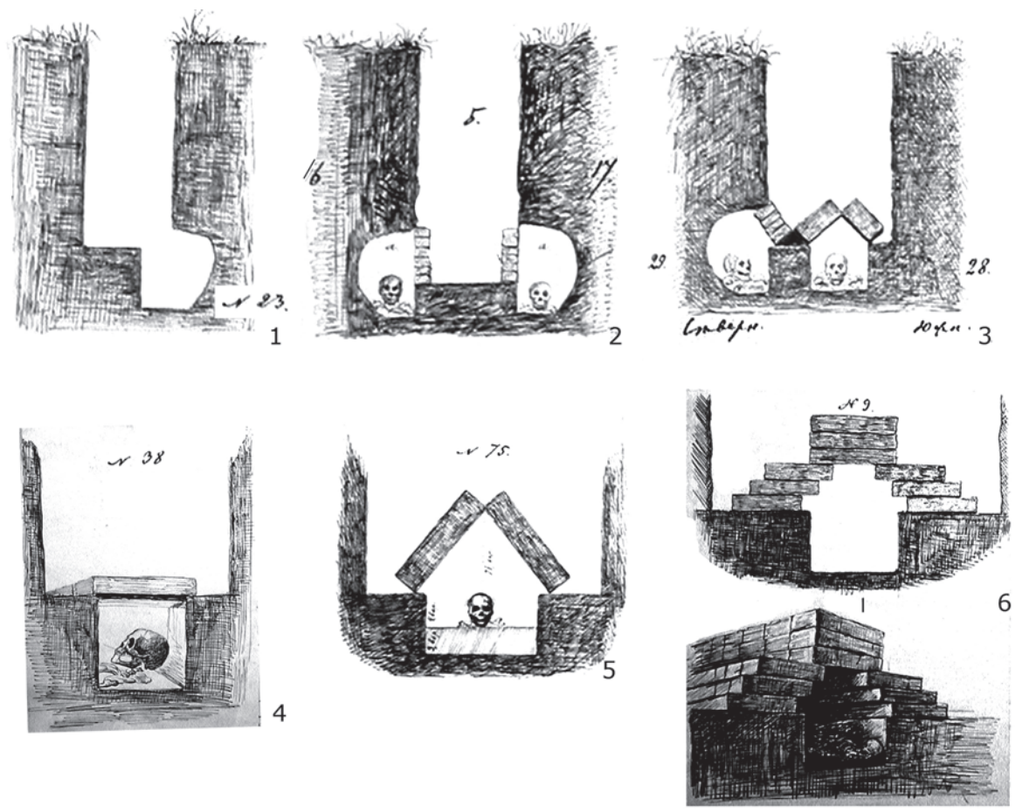

Fig. 33. Types of grave structures of the burials of the Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach Christian cemetery (Pantusov 1886)

vertical shaft, but at a level somewhat lower than the shaft; in some cases, the lining was closed with bricks [or a brick wall] (Fig. 33, *1–2*). In another type, a distinctive crypt was formed directly in the vertical shaft which had "shoulders" [or ledges], so that the walls consisted [natural] soil, and the covering, which rested on the "shoulders", was made of brick in different types of masonry (Fig. 33, *3–6*). In some cases, a combination of both types was recorded within one grave pit. There was also recorded use of wooden coffins, but without a lid – they were covered with bricks resting on the edges; however, their use was not widespread. At the head of one coffin, there was an incised image of the cross (Fig. 34). In all these cases, the deceased was laid horizontally on their back, with their head at the western end. The position of their hands was in a variety of poses.

Also in the cemetery there were several small architectural funerary structures as described above. Thus, we can state that the funeral rite in the cemetery was mostly limited, but not homogeneous. At the same time, a number of burials seemed to be contrary to Christian tradition, but the presence of stones with crosses indicates that these burials belonged to Christians. What caused the differences in burial type – whether social, cultural, ethnic, or chronological aspect – is a matter of interpretation.

Burana cemetery ("near Tokmak"). Excavations in this cemetery were conducted in the years 1885–1886. In 1885, F. V. Poyarkov opened a few trenches with 4×1 m units, and in the next year, 1886, A. M. Fetisov (allowed by the permit of N. N. Pantusov) investigated thirty-four more burials (Fetisov 1888, l. 102–120). The report stated that the cemetery:

> is located on the site of Burana, ... in 5 versts[15] north of the foothills of the Aleksander Ridge, on the right bank of the large mountain stream of Kayerma-Aryk (flowing from the gorge of the Aleksander Ridge). In the southern part of the ruins of the ancient city, at a distance of about 1½ versts south of the ancient tower, which is called by the Kirghiz "Burana", the settlement has the same name. ... in 100 sajenes[16] to the north of the cemetery there is a dry channel of the Burana-Sainyn-boyu ... on the northeastern side, 50 sajenes[17] from this cemetery there are two rather high mounds (Figs. 35–36).

From the north and west, the boundaries of a natural terrace served as the borders of the cemetery.

In fact, there were no external features that indicated burials. As noted in the archival document, the cemetery "presents an almost smooth surface, and at the same time there is great scarcity in tombstones (and especially with inscriptions). ... tombstones with crosses are only occasionally found under the upper layer of soil, and even those, as excavations

[15] i.e. 5.3 km.
[16] Approximately 213.36 m.
[17] Approximately 106.68 m.

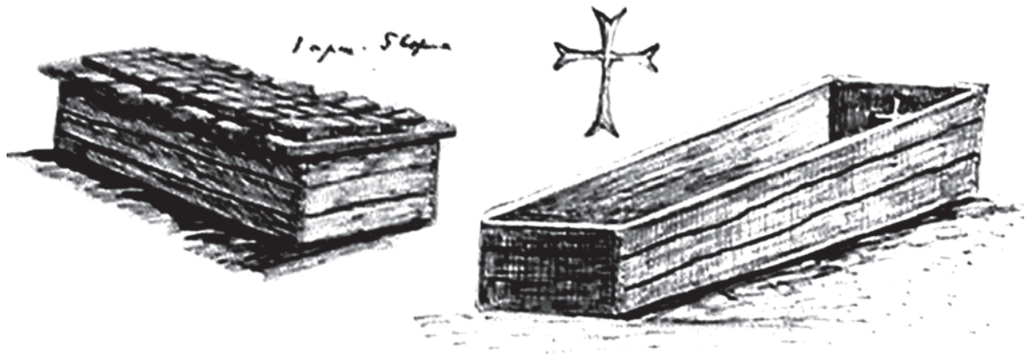

Fig. 34. A wooden coffin from a burial in Hill B and the image of a cross on its wall (Pantusov 1886)

indicated, now lie out of place and therefore do not serve as indicators of their respective graves" (Pantusov 1888, l. 100-a). As a result of this, a continuous excavation of the territory to a depth of 1.75–1.8 m was carried out, starting from the eastern end of the trench made by F. V. Poyarkov in 1885 (Fig. 37).

This allowed them to identify more than thirty burials. In the journal of 1886, there are descriptions of thirty-one excavated graves and several drawings of them. Descriptions of the "graves" Nos. 14 and 15 turned out to be missing, and the last one described was No. 33 (Fetisov 1888). It was established that the distance between the graves was so insignificant that the intervals between the bones did not exceed 1 m (Pantusov 1888, l. 100-b). However, there is no particular consistency in their location – A. M. Fetisov noted that in one row there were no more than 3 to 4 graves, and then the ordering of burials changed in another direction (Fetisov 1888, l. 120-a).

It was found that the burials were deposited in pits, and, in one case, in a chamber. The "standard" depth of the graves was 1.6–2 m, some are lower by 2.25–2.3 m. All those buried were laid with their heads at the west end (with a slight deviation from the cardinal points of the compass). The burials had no inventory of grave goods, but in seven cases there were individuals with personal jewelry – rings, earrings, bracelets and one pectoral cross. Among the excavated burials, the majority were simple pits – in 17 cases. But here it is necessary to point out that within nine of these were infants/children with deciduous teeth; often they were dug at a lower depth – 0.7–1.15 m. There were 13 burials recorded with interior wall linings. In all cases, except one, the lining is formed by mudbrick. As a rule, the linings' locations relative to the entrance pit were not indicated, but it was provided for the first two cases – at the northern side (Fetisov 1888, l. 103-a, 105-a). It must be assumed that a similar position is implied further. In three cases, linings were noted on both sides of the entrance pit (Fetisov 1888, l. 108-a – 110-b, 118-b – 120-a). The dating of this cemetery is also determined by the dates of gravestones found here – mainly of the 13th–14th centuries.

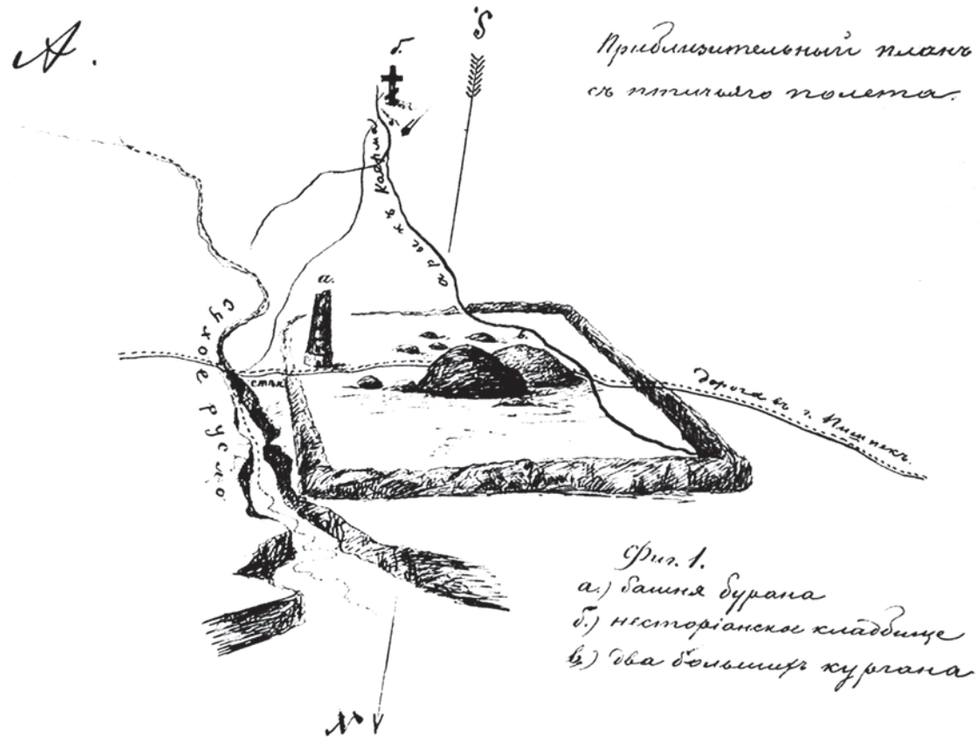

Fig. 35. Sketch drawing of the site of Burana with the designation of the location of the Christian cemetery in 1886 (Fetisov 1888)

When comparing the data of the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) and Burana cemeteries with studies of other medieval necropolises (and a few earlier ones) – Ak-Beshim (church excavated in 1954 by L. R. Kyzlasov), Krasnaya Rechka, and the Belovodskaya Fortress, it is necessary to point out the different organizations of space. In the first case, there was a single stratum of burials (since there is no evidence of damage of one grave cut into by another) and graves were strictly organized by clearly placed rows. The burials at the necropolises of the Krasnaya Rechka and Belovodskaya Fortress were multi-layered (often one grave cut by another) and are multi-confessional. Specific Christians burials were not apparently isolated from the masses of buried population, but are determined by their orientation (head at the west) and the interior lining of the shafts. Likewise, the Christian burials at the Area IV of Ak-Beshim were also on a single stratum, belonging to one denomination.

However, the most important thing to mention is that gravestones with epitaphs are neither known at the Ak-Beshim church graves nor in the necropolises at Krasnaya Rechka and the Belovodskaya Fortress. We believe that this was a new cultural tradition brought to the Chuy Valley by a new wave of Christians in the 12th century, superimposed on the burial traditions of the local Turkic-speaking population.

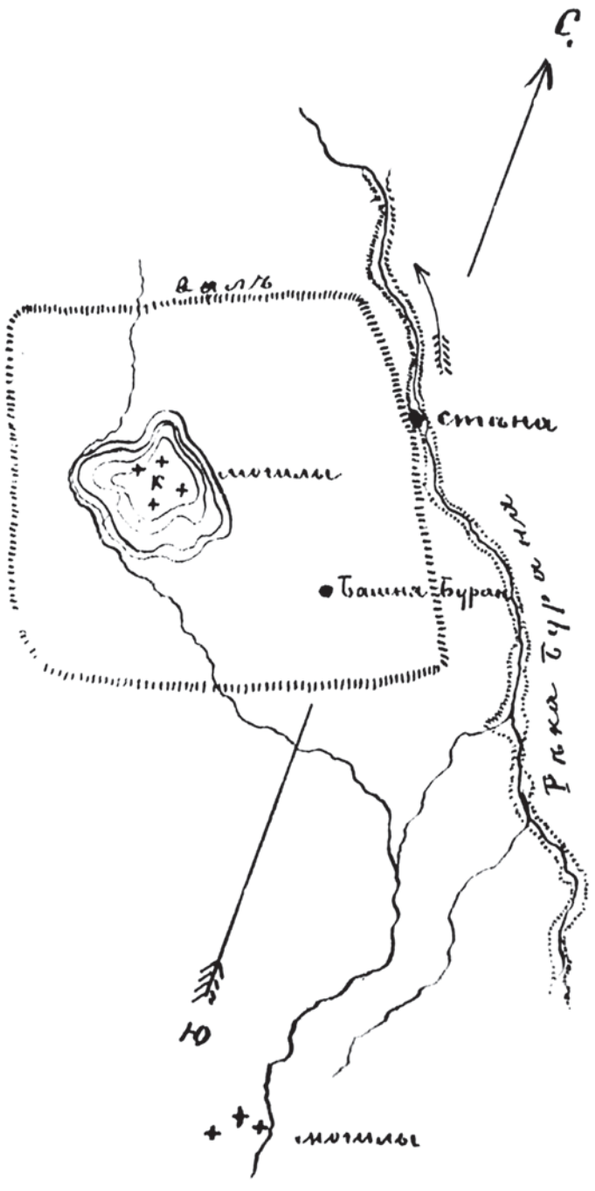

Fig. 36. Layout of the Burana ancient settlement with the localization of the Christian cemetery in 1886 (Fetisov 1888)

Juuka cemetery (Pokrovskoye) cemetery. Almost nothing is known about the Juuka (Pokrovskoye) medieval Christian cemetery. The stones with Christian (and Muslim –?) epitaphs were found by local residents in 1907. N. N. Pantusov received photographs of two stones (one Christian, which was published by P. K. Kokovtsov, and one Muslim) and collected only written answers to his question regarding the circumstances of the objects. According to the data cited by him, the epitaphs were found "about eight versts to the west of Pokrovskoye (Slivkino) village, ..., against the Zauke Gorge (along the Karakirgiz Juuka), 150 sajenes from the southern coast of Issyk-Kul, along the course of Zauke river" (Pantusov 1909, p. 14). That is, they were found 300–350 m from the then coastline and 8–9 km west of the village, now called Kyzyl-Suu (in the Jety-Oghuz district), on the banks of the Juuka River (without specifying which one). Now along the highway, about 8.5–9 km to the west (with some deviation to the south) from the village of Kyzyl-Suu, the river Juuka separates the villages of Darkhan and Saruu. The coastline at the confluence of the river flows into the lake 4.5–5 km from these villages; its course has been unstable and subject to regular flooding, which makes it almost pointless to reference it for the sake of localizing where the gravestones were found. Under the water in the coastal zone of the lake there stands one of the largest

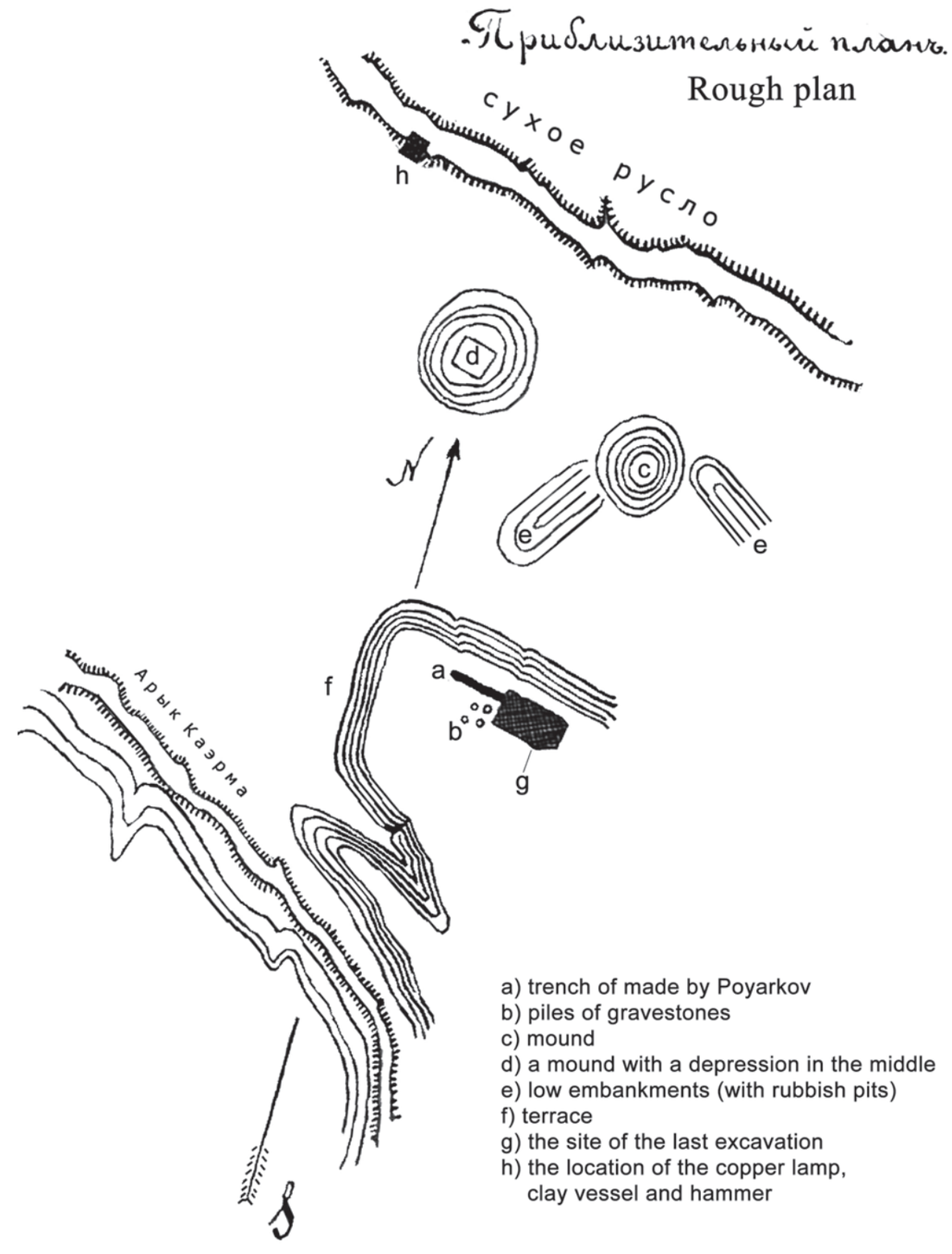

Fig. 37. Layout of the Christian cemetery of the Burana ancient settlement 1886 (Fetisov 1888)

medieval fortifications of the region – known as Darkhan, dated by researchers to the 8th–12th centuries (Vinnik 1967, pp. 99–100).

It should be remembered that initially there were found four stones – three Christian and one Muslim – including two with inscriptions and only one with the image of the cross. Allegedly, these were transferred to the Issyk-Kul Orthodox monastery, which was located on the northeastern coast of the lake. From them, it must be assumed that N. N. Pantusov received the picture of the two Christian stones with the inscription. Then N. N. Pantusov received a letter informing him about another stone with "Syro-Chaldean letters" and a cross, as well as a stone with an "old Chinese" inscription (Pantusov 1909, p. 15). Inspection of the area under the direction of Colonel Shoste, the head of the Przhevalsky Uyezd, revealed "a few stones (slabs) with the image of a cross, but I have not found any stones with inscriptions"; the stones were left in the cemetery. According to the opinion of Shoste expressed by N. N. Pantusov, "the grave elevations were almost leveled to the ground, and the small space it occupied represents the area dotted with slabs dug into the earth of various shapes and sizes" (Pantusov 1909, p. 15).

In 1966, somewhere in this vicinity, a village resident of Saruu found another stone with an inscription, which was translated and published by C. D. Jumagulov (1982, pp. 40–43, Tab. XVIII).

Separate Christian objects, including gravestones, are known from the ancient settlements of Novo-Pokrovsky IV and V (the artifacts are now located in the museum of the village school at Novo-Pokrovka) (Fig. 38; Fig. 39.3). There is some interesting information provided by N. N. Pantusov: "The Kirghiz also say that there are large stone monuments with crosses along the Chu River much lower than Pishpek, a few dozen versts from the latter" (Pantusov 1886, p. 78). But this has never been confirmed.

Fig. 38. Kairak (gravestone) with the image of the cross and an imitation (?) of an inscription. Random find in the area around the Novo-Pokrovskoye-IV ancient settlement. Museum of School № 2 of the Novo-Pokrovka village

Gravestones. Let us turn to the Christian epitaphs. Because the present writer is not a philologist, this passage relies on the work of specialists in this field. The exact number of Christian gravestones found in the Chu Valley (as well as in Issyk-Kul and Almalyk) is unknown. Some publications state the total is about 700 examples (Jumagulov 1987, p. 38). The inscriptions on them were made in Syriac letters, with the exception of one inscription partially written in Armenian script (Marr 1894). Linguistically, these were rendered in the Syriac,

Syro-Turkic, Turkic and (the one, above mentioned) Armenian languages. In the center of the front side of the stone there is an image of the cross (in the epitaphs from Almalyk the cross is smaller and located in the uppermost section). The script forms horizontal lines, written from the right to the left, from above and below the cross; and the vertical lines, read from top to bottom, located to the right and to the left of the cross. The number of lines on each side is either 1 or 2; less often – up to 4. However, the lines may be absent on the sides, above or below (Figs. 40–42). A significant number of stones had only the image of the cross (Fig. 41.4); in the 19th century, almost all such stones were left in place (as described above).

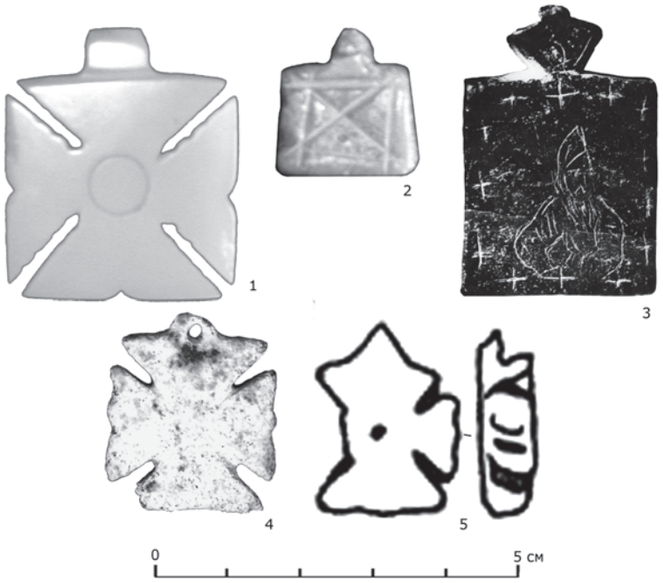

Fig. 39. Pectoral crosses and amulets made of stone: 1, 2, 4 – Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement; 3 – Novo-Pokrovskoye-V ancient settlement; 5 – Ancient Ak-Beshim settlement, complex of Christian churches

The non-Nestorian (Armenian) example is specific to only one inscription, and it is concluded that there must have been a community belonging to this denomination (Marr 1894, p. 348). The remaining inscriptions are considered, by most researchers, to be Nestorian.

Considering the hardness and rigidity of the material – stone – many experts-philologists prefer not to define the handwriting as either Estrangela, Nestorian, Jacobite or Melkite, but only indicate its Syriac characteristics. However, D. Chwolson wrote: "All of our inscriptions belong to the Nestorians and are written with Syriac-Nestorian letters of a latest forms...in which, the characters start to become italic, and there are completely new forms for some letters" (Chwolson 1886, p. 85). C. D. Jumagulov

unequivocally believed that the script was Nestorian, without providing any convincing arguments, instead referring to the comparative table of K. Brokkelman and K. T. Tsereteli (Jumagulov 1971, pp. 23–24). Estrangela, being the oldest form of Syriac manuscript and epigraphic writing, originally developed [from Aramaic] based on Phoenician script of the 1st–2nd centuries, and was in uppercase letters (majuscules), i.e. a type of writing that separates letters (Mesherskaya 1987, p. 124, 127); in contrast, on the considered monuments,

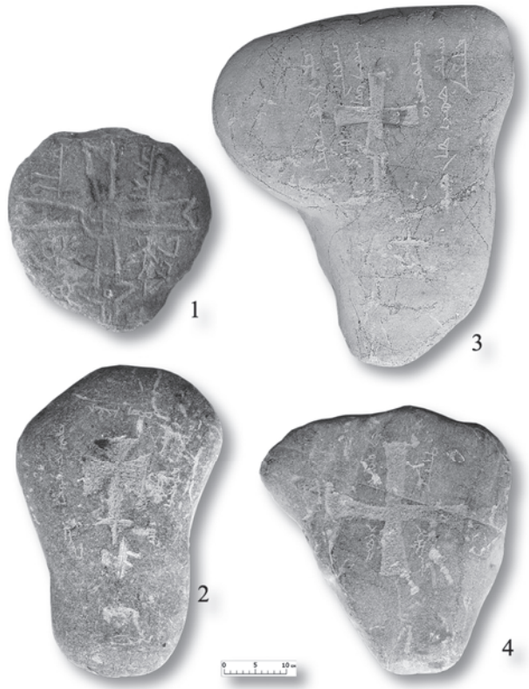

Fig. 40. Kairaks (gravestones). Random finds. Funds of Archaeological Architectural Museum "Burana Tower"

Fig. 41. Kairaks (gravestones). Random finds. Funds of Archaeological Architectural Museum "Burana Tower"

the kairaks, inscriptions were written in cursive, the letters connected together, i. e. while in uppercase letters (Mesherskaya 1987, p. 127). Regarding the spelling of some letters, for example *tav*, P. K. Kokovtsov (following D. Chwolson), wrote about its graphic design, which had characteristic of the Melkites or Jacobites (Monophysites); however, these forms were not common for Estrangela or Nestorian-specific writing. He provided statistical calculations on the instances of this letter within 132 inscriptions that were available to him. Exceptionally, such a form was used in more than 80 % of cases [on the kairaks]. In about 10 % of other epitaphs, the letter *tav* was written on the same stone in a characteristic manner for both Melkite-Jacobite and Estrangela-non-Nestorian handwriting (Kokovtsov 1909, pp. 779–780).

Another fact that casts doubt on the Nestorian attribution of graves is the script in vertical lines. According to some western scholars such as Land Duval, cited by E. N. Mesherskaya, vertical writing is characteristic of the Jacobite book-writing tradition (Mesherskaya 1987, p. 135). However, Zachau cites a number of epigraphic monuments with vertical line writing (Zachau 1882, pp. 142–167). C.D. Jumagulov characterized this fact ambiguously: "How did Nestorian Turks write? Most scholars recognize a vertically-spelled word is

Syriac" (Jumagulov 1971, p. 18). It can be concluded that for Jumagulov, all these kairak monuments were Nestorian, as well as the Syriac writing being exclusively Nestorian.

Another characteristic criterion for determining the identity of Syriac writing is the vowelization system. In Jacobite scripts, vowels are conveyed by the lowercase letters of the Greek alphabet above and below the lines; in Nestorian, there is a similar system which uses points; while Melkite is characterized by the absence of additional signs (Mesherskaya 1987, p. 136). In numerous publications, photographs and drawings of the inscriptions, there are nearly no visible diacritical marks. However, C. D. Jumagulov wrote about the use of dots to indicate the plural, which is similar to their use in the Old Turkic Runic script (Jumagulov 1971, p. 25). We did not find any superscript and subscript symbols during direct examination of the kairaks available to us. But it should be remembered that the aforementioned characteristics are given by researchers for manuscripts [not epigraphy].

Fig. 42. Kairaks (gravestones). Random finds. Funds of the Institute of History and Cultural Heritage of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) of the Kyrgyz Republic

On the other hand, there are facts that allow us to unambiguously associate a number of inscriptions to non-Nestorian Christians. For instance, P. K. Kokovtsov drew attention to the names of the months used by Nestorians, and the days of the week indicated by the first lines of corresponding church hymns (Kokovtsov 1909, pp. 789–794). But the group of kairaks with such concisse dating is very limited.

It is worth mentioning the year-designation system in these monuments. Years were indicated both in linear and cyclical forms. Moreover, both the former and latter systems can be used separately, or both can be used together. In a number of monuments, dating is absent altogether. In a cyclical form, a 12-year Turkic-Mongolian animal cycle is used. The name of the year is usually given in the Turkic language. When using only this form, the date remains virtually unidentifiable.

With the linear form of calendar, two different eras were used on the kairaks: the Armenian, in which we have only one recorded case (Marr 1894) and the Alexander system [also known as Seleucid Era or *Anno Graecorum*]. The exact number of instances where

the latter was used has not been counted, but there are several examples. On a significant number of stones with the year indicated, the name of the era is not provided, but by comparing the numbers it appears that reckoning is based the regnal years of Alexander the Great. In modern literature, it is called Seleucid system – according to the name of the commander and one of the successors of Alexander the Great, Seleucus I Nicator, and begins at the year 311 BC. It is interesting to note that in Syriac books written by both Nestorians and the Monophysites, this era is called the "year of the Greek" (Pigulevskaya 1941, p. 83; History ... 1958, p. 75). This fact allowed P. K. Kokovtsov to describe the Semirechye inscriptions as using a calendrical system based on the "Era of Alexander" (Kokovtsov 1909, p. 783).

The Christian epigraphy of Semirechye is dated, basically, to the 13th–14th centuries, but there are also individual monuments dating to the 10th–12th and even the 8th centuries (Chwolson 1886, pp. 88–89; Goryacheva, Peregudova 1994, pp. 91–92). However, the earlier date has been disputed by V. Klein, who proposed his own reading of those controversial epitaphs – he interprets those years as 1426 / 1114–1115 and 1606/1295 years (Klein 2000, pp. 163–165).

In summary, regarding the Christian gravestone inscriptions, we can state the presence of an indisputable group of Nestorian gravestones and an Armenian one. We have an overwhelming number of epitaphs, but based on the limited information provided in them, it seems ill-advised to draw a rigid conclusion about their particular confessional creed within Christianity. When we compare the research and observations of expert philologists regarding their paleography, there is not unequivocal attribution of the monuments as Nestorian, and this question requires further epigraphical research, along with a clear reasoning of any conclusion drawn.

Separate finds

The individual artifacts of medieval Christianity found in Kyrgyzstan can be divided into several categories: pectoral, metal and stone crosses, and amulets that are similar in size; ceramic products – vessels with benevolent inscriptions and terracotta plaques; and interior decoration in buildings. The latter, presumably, include a stone truncated biconical object found in the vicinity of Osh city. Equilateral crosses with flared ends were impressed on each side. Moreover, on one side the image is very clear in relief; in contrast, on the second it indistinct – as if it was erased. We will refrain from dating and attributing a function to this artifact. We note that this is the only known Christian artifact in the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley.Among the ceramics associated with Christianity, first of all, we will mention the Sogdian inscription on a *khum* (Fig. 43.1), found south of the central ruins of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement during the construction of the Great Chüy Canal (БЧК) in 1941 that was mentioned above (Chuy Valley 1950, p. 89). V. A. Livshits originally translated it in the following manner: "This *khum* is (intended) for the teacher

Fig. 43. Sogdian inscriptions on khums with a Christian text: 1 – from the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement; 2 – from the vicinity of the Novo-Pokrovka village; 3 – from the site of Taraz (Livshits 2008)

of Yaruk-Tegin. Master – Pastun. Let it be (the *khum*) full. Amen, Amen!" (Livshits 1989, pp. 81–82; cf: Livshits 2002, p. 131, Fig. 3). Twenty years later he provided a slightly different interpretation at the end of the inscription: "This vessel (was made) for the teacher of Yaruk-tegin. Master (?) – Pashtvan. Let it be (teacher?) diligent" and it is noted that the word "teacher" is from the Syriac *mpl'ny*, i.e. having religious implications (Livshits 2008, pp. 353–354).

In addition, there are known two more inscriptions with the similar inscription "master Pastun / Pashtvan" – from the same site of Krasnaya Rechka and from the neighborhood of the of Novo-Pokrovka village. Both of them were also found in 1941 during the construction of the Great Chüy Canal (БЧК). The first one is fragmentary and short: "The master of this *khum* is Pastun" (Livshits 1989, p. 82). The other one has two lines (Fig. 43.2). It was found somewhere near the village of Novo-Pokrovka, probably in its western area (Chuy Valley 1951, p. 91). The artifact is not directly related to any of the five ancient settlements that were recorded formerly in the outskirts of the village (Kozhemyako 1959, pp. 107–111, 141–144; Kolchenko and Rott 2005). The inscription was translated as: "(1) This vessel is a gift of the people (or "community") of Pakap. Drink this wine in joyful times, sagacious sovereign (?). (2) For the sovereign Alp-Bilga, who received charism from the gods (into his) property (?). May (he) be happy, prosperous" (Livshits 2008, pp. 354–355).

The most recent discovery of a Sogdian inscription on a *khum* (Fig. 44) was found in Church A within the ecclesiastical complex at Ak-Beshim. The inscription does not directly state anything about Christianity – "This vessel, along with the dishware (?) ..., was donated for (his) majesty Alan the Prosperous" (Livshits 2002, p. 128; Livshits 2008, pp. 358–363). The very fact that it was found in the church's *khum-khon* testifies to Christian winemaking and also indirectly provides some evidence that Area VIII served as a large

Fig. 44. Inscription on a khum from the khum-khon room in Church A in the complex of Christian churches (Area VIII) of the ancient settlement of Ak-Beshim

monastery with its own economy (and lands – ?) (Semenov 1999). This object is also important for giving us additional archaeological confirmation that such inscriptions existed at the beginning of the second millennium.

There is a similar text associated with Christianity (or, perhaps, Manichaeism) that was discovered in the Kazakh part of the Chuy Valley at the Kysmychi ancient settlement, which A. N. Bernshtam considered to be the medieval city of Yakalyk (Chuy Valley 1950, p. 27, Tab. XXVII.1). This fragment has this inscription "... Bishop Shirfan" (Livshits 1989, p. 83; Livshits 2008, p. 355). Also from the territory of Kazakhstan, at the medieval city of Taraz, in the middle part of the Talas river valley, there was found another inscription on a *khum* (Fig. 43.*3*) indicating a cleric: "Presbyter Il-tag" (Livshits 1989, p. 83; Livshits 2008, pp. 355–356).

The use of the word "teacher" (*malp'ânâ*), in the inscriptions referring to Pastun from Krasnaya Rechka and those individuals mentioned on inscriptions from Kysmyschi and Taraz, can be understood as an indication of either Christianity or Manichaeism. The fact that Christians were engaged in winemaking in the Chuy Valley, as recorded by the inscription in the complex of churches of Ak-Beshim, adds more weight towards the first of these interpretations [that is, that these inscriptions are Christian rather than Manichaean].

Among the randomly found ceramic artifacts – of a type different than the inscriptions on the *khums* – it is necessary to mention a fragment of a plaque from the shahristan at the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement (Fig. 45). It was not identified and published among the other ceramics of the 10th–12th centuries with stamped ornament, although it is completely similar to the plaques from Ak-Beshim (Goryacheva 2010, Fig. 211).

In the early 1980s there was found two objects – a small rectangular medallion made of white stone upon which was traced a skewed cross and a jade pectoral cross (Figs. 39.*1–2, 4*) (Goryacheva 1988, Fig. 27). Another jade cross, with a slightly different style was found at the site of Ak-Beshim during the excavations of the Area VIII (Fig. 39.*5*) (Semenov 2002, Fig. 54.*6*).

Finally, in the archive of the school museum of Novo-Pokrovka village, we made a copy of a photograph depicting a small medallion (Fig. 39.*3*) and recorded the data written in the inventory, which stated:

> A rectangular medallion made of black stone with a small heart-shaped protrusion in the upper part for attaching; the clasp is broken. On one side there is a drawing resembling two sword laid crosswise, depicted by three parallel lines; bordered on the edge by a rectangle, drawn by parallel lines. On the front side there is a warrior in a pointed fur cap and fur clothes. It resembles the Saka [Scythians]. On the edge of the rectangle there are small crosses (13 instances).

The inventory also indicates that it was found in the area of the Novo-Pokrovskoye-V ancient settlement and stated its dimensions: the total height with its protrusion is 3.8 cm, the dimensions of the rectangle are 3×2.4×0.3 cm. [We have a different interpretation.] It seems to us that on the front face there is an image of a monk with a beard wearing a woven headdress and cassock; on the back – there is a slanting cross, similar to that on the medallion from Krasnaya Rechka. Thus, there is a collection of Christian artifacts used by private individuals made of stone. Due to the random nature of discovery of the majority of them, it is hardly appropriate to discuss their dating, except for the Ak-Beshim example which can serve as chronological reference point.

In recent years, a large number of Christian artifacts, such as metal pectoral crosses, were "accidentally" uncovered. It seems that the total number found in the country has exceeded one hundred. The vast majority of them are small in size – between 2 and 5 cm – and are made of bronze; however, there are larger objects of between 6 and 8 cm. In addition to bronze, there are crosses made of silver and lead (?). In terms of primary classification, they can be divided into three groups. The first two are objects that are, respectively, flat and round in section [i.e. cylindrical]; both are casted. Moreover, as already indicated, they are of local manufacture (Rott 2005, p. 48). A separate category constitutes crosses stamped on coins – of the Turgesh and Karakhanid variety; the latter ones are especially important for their dating at the beginning of the second millennium.

It seems that the crosses, round in section, did not have enough time in their development and function in society, to begin conforming to one specific type. There are both equal-arm crosses and crosses with equal-length vertical arms, or those that emphasize either the upper or lower parts. But in all cases, the ends of the crosses are not simply curved, but have complex-shapes, each consisting of three to five elements added to the axis. There is also an oblique type of cross with one or two sides drawn congruously in the place of the crossline.

Flat-casted crosses are also found with a different outline, but always without anthropomorphic figures or other symbols. The most common form is the variant with equilateral ends, flaring from the center to the edges, ending with two beads. Somewhat less common is the form with incongruous ends. In both variants there are often a crossline marked – with a small bead, a relief circle, or an increased thickness. The cross which is framed by a scalloped four-leafed frame and forms a medallion, is another traditional variant.

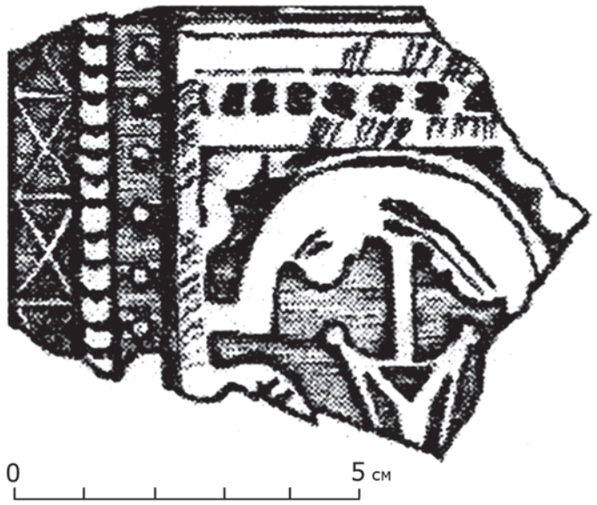

Fig. 45. Fragment of a ceramic plaque from the ancient settlement of Krasnaya Rechka. Random find (Goryacheva 2010)

Dating these crosses is quite difficult, since only three (!) of them have some archaeological context – and even these are subject to relative dating. There was a flat cross with flared ends, however, that was found in woman's burial in the necropolis of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement (Fig. 27); and likewise, a flat cross was uncovered during excavation of a dwelling (dated to the Karakhanid era – ?) in 1972 at the same site (Goryacheva 1988, p. 67). There was also a round-section cross discovered during the excavations of the Christian church at Ak-Beshim led by L. R. Kyzlasov; it was not published with the excavation report, but we managed to find a pencil drawing of the object in the field inventory manuscript (Fig. 46).[18] As such, the dating of these crosses are considered to be of the 8th to 11th (12th) century, taking into account both the originally proposed dates and what was discussed above.

The geographical area is limited where the crosses were "randomly" found. This includes the sites of Burana, Ak-Beshim, Krasnaya Rechka and Kara-Jigach in the Chuy Valley, and the Karakol district – Kurmentov on the shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. Oddly enough, these kinds of crosses have not been found by amateurs who search for artifacts west of Bishkek. It remains unclear whether this is due to insufficient activity [of such amateurs] or the absence of Christian communities in the numerous cities located in this region during the Middle Ages.

Similar objects in Central Asia, generally, are not numerous, but they are common and known in many historical and cultural areas. For example, Christian artifacts have been found in these regions: the middle reaches of the neighboring Talas Valley (Rempel 1983, pp. 169–176), Chach (Bogomolov 1994, pp. 71–78), Sogdia (Terenozhkin 1950, pp. 166; Belenitsky et al. 1982, p. 217), Merv (Loginov, Simpson 1994) and others. When describing such objects, often scholars use a phrase, to the extent that it has almost become a stereotype: "the Nestorian cross".

[18] The inventory was provided to us by B. E. Amanbayeva, for what we express our gratitude to her. She received it from G. A. Brykina, its author, in the collection of materials for the dissertation. I. L. Kyzlasov informed us that in the archive of L. R. Kyzlasov he also found a drawing and photograph of this cross.

Applying this term to the description of iconographically different forms, as Terenozhkin (1950, p. 167) and Musakayeva (1994, p. 46) does, casts doubt on their culturological conclusions, regarding items that Nestorians owned and the subsequent analysis. Unfortunately, we were not able to find the starting point when this term was first applied or first described/drawn in the literature.

As far as one can judge [from the general publications], most often they bring to mind an equal-armed cross with four ends, flaring from the center to the edge. But this form of the cross was used both in Byzantium during the 6th–10th centuries (Darkevich 1966, Tab. 15, 21; Moran 1982, pp. 255–256. Figs. 429–430), and in western Europe, for example, in Lieveren (The Netherlands), where Nestorianism had never reached (Darkevich 1966, p. 8). A. Donini calls the cross of this form "Maltese" (Donini 1989, pp. 160–161). Among Russian and other national orders, this form is common and traditional, for example, the state decoration known as the St. George's Cross. Furthermore, the same cross is depicted on the tent-shaped dome of the Issyk-Kul "monastery of Armenian brothers" of the *Catalan Atlas* of 1375 (Klein 2000, p. 430).

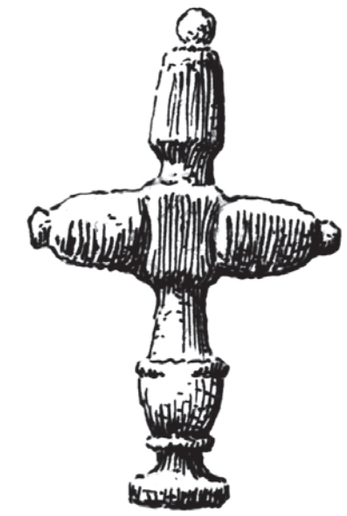

Fig. 46. Pencil drawing of a bronze pectoral cross discovered in a burial at the Christian church (Area IV) of Ak-Beshim, during the excavations of 1954 (Kyzlasov 1954)

Another documented iconographic variant which is often called "Nestorian cross" is one similar to the image on Ak-Beshim plaques – an elongated bottom part with bifurcated ends. But certainly the same form of cross is widespread in other regions. For example, Armenian grave structures – *khachkars*, which are synchronous with the cemeteries of Kara-Jigach and Burana have this form (*Memorial monuments...* 1984). Some additional information about these forms of crosses is available in the article by F. Rott (2005, pp. 48–50).

The above examples show the failure of the term or, at least, the invalidity of attributing objects with this image solely to Nestorian Christians, based only on this iconography. There were a large variety of forms with equilateral crosses from the graves of the Chuy Valley, so that the term "Nestorian cross" is simply meaningless [without further qualifications] (Jumagulov 1987, p. 134; Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994, p. 93).

Generalizations

To summarize our considerations, we would like to point out two aspects: the geography of the spread of Christian artifacts within the territory of Kyrgyzstan and their dating. Then, having correlated the archaeological data with written sources, we will outline our picture of the history of medieval Christianity in this country.

Geography of expansion. We are aware of six locations where Christian artifacts were found in the Chuy Valley and two in Ferghana. In general, it is possible to identify about eight locations where medieval Christianity existed in Kyrgyzstan. Of course, they are not equivalent to each other, neither in the reliability of the data, or in the concentration and diversity of finds, or in their dating.

The first fixed point where Christian artifacts were discovered was the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) cemetery near the village with the same name. It was located 5–7 km southeast of the current border of the city of Bishkek. Some researchers identify the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) village with the ancient city of Tarsakent, mentioned by Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat. As we wrote above, in the 19th century this location was studied in terms of: burials, linings, and pits under the grave structures (earthen hills, brick structures, stone fences) and mausoleums; gravestones from these burials, some of which have exact dates; and also pectoral crosses were found here outside the excavated burials.

The second fixed point is the village of Novo-Pokrovka. It is located 6–8 km north-northeast of Kara-Jigach and its eastern end is adjacent to the borders of modern Bishkek. There were four finds related to Christianity: a set of silver utensils and a jug with Christian symbols (Fig. 2) (Gorodetsky 1926); a miniature stone amulet with an image of monk, found in northeastern part of the village in the neighborhood of the site of Novo-Pokrovskoye-V (Fig. 39.*3*); a gravestone with a cross discovered in 1986 in the area of the Novo-Pokrovskoye-IV ancient settlement in the northwestern part of the village (Fig. 38); and a *khum*, probably excavated in the same place in 1941 with an inscription containing characteristic Christian phrases (Fig. 43.*2*). In other words, Christian artifacts were located in different parts of the modern village at a distance of 3 to 4 kilometers from each other and were not attached to any of the settlements of the Novo-Pokrovskoye group.

The third point where Christian artifacts were discovered is the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement. It is located 32–36 km east of Bishkek and was the largest city in the Chuy Valley. The site is identified with the medieval city of Nevaket/Sin-chen. Over the years, there were found several objects: inscriptions on *khums* associated with Christianity (Fig. 43.*1*); pectoral crosses of various types made of bronze and stone, and one that was found within a burial (Fig. 27); and one cross – found in a residential building of Karakhanids; fragments of ceramic icon-plaques (Fig. 45); a vessel with the image of a cross (Fig. 28); ceramics; and gravestones (Fig. 3). Some of these finds were found in different parts of the central ruins, while others were found in the eastern part of the rampart wall; that is, Christian artifacts were found at a somewhat remote distance of 200–300 m to 3–4 km away from the main city wall. However, they are in the same medieval settlement.

The next fourth point is the site of Ak-Beshim. It is located 20 km in a straight line to the south-east of the central ruins of the village of Krasnaya Rechka and almost 8 km west of the modern city of Tokmok. The settlement is identified with the medieval city of Suyab – the capital of the Western Turks and Turgeshs. During professional archaeological

excavations, in this settlement area there were discovered and studied Christian architectural objects: the church in shahristan-2 and the complex of churches in shahristan-1 described above. Artifacts revealed during these excavations are the most important chronological references for dating other randomly found objects. In addition to the Christian artifacts obtained during the excavation of this ancient settlement, a "significant" number of metal pectoral crosses were discovered "by accident", including the northwest of shahristan-1. However no epitaphs were found here.

The fifth point of medieval Christianity in the Chuy Valley is the Burana ancient settlement. It is located 8 km southeast of the central ruins of Ak-Beshim and 10 km in a straight line on a map south of Tokmok. The site is identified as one of the capital cities of the Kara-Khitan and Karakhanids, once known as Balasagun. In the 19th century, Christian cemeteries were discovered here, identified by burial epitaphs, located south of the central ruins, and about 50 graves were excavated (as described above). A pectoral cross was found in one of them. Formerly, M. E. Masson wrote about his discovery of a new Christian cemetery north of shahristan, but he did not provide any drawings, photographs, or descriptions to confirm this announcement. Thus, this site was only known through one phrase of an authoritative scientist. In the following years, many gravestones were found at the site, but no systematic investigations were conducted; some of the gravestones have been published (Figs. 40 and 41). Several pectoral bronze crosses were also found around the central ruins.

It is known that there is a cross made from a Karakhanid coin dated to the late 11th – early 12th century found in the Chuy Valley. According to information from the owner, who possesses a large private collection of artifacts, this cross came from the Shish-Tyube site, located 60 km west of Bishkek, on the northern outskirts of Kara-Balta city, identified with the medieval city of Nuzket.

The sixth reliable location where Christian artifacts were found in Kyrgyzstan, as previously mentioned, is the Issyk-Kul basin, along the southeastern part of the coast near the Juuka River. We consider it at the extreme eastern point in the Chuy Valley and was remote; it is situated 220–225 km, in a straight line, east of the Burana ancient settlement. Over the years, there were found several gravestones here, allowing us to assume that there was a cemetery in the area. As we wrote above, two stones with inscriptions were published from here.

Another Issyk-Kul location of Christian artifacts is the area stretching from Karakol to the village of Kurmenty, including the Kurmenty site itself, – it is located 45–55 km away, from a straight line in a northeastern direction to the cemetery on the Juuka River, and occupies the north-eastern coast of the lake. Several pectoral crosses and a silver box-reliquary (?) were found here "accidentally". Travelling in a northeastern direction from the Kurmenty-Karakol area beyond two mountain ranges, for about 100 km in a straight line on the map, one arrives at the Talgar ancient settlement (Kazakhstan), which is the next closest point where Christian artifacts were discovered.

In the Talas Valley there is the seventh authentic point of where Christian artifacts were found – the Ak-Tobe Talas ancient settlement. It is identified with the medieval city of Tekabket. Among the published ceramics from the excavations of 1956, on one fragment there was an equilateral cross with arms that flared outwards from the center to the edges, it was etched before firing (Kozhemyako 1963, Table II).

Also in Talas, on the site of the Sadyr-Kurgan, identified with the medieval city of Shelji, two or three bronze medallions were found "accidentally", which can be interpreted as Christian (Kamyshev 2012, p. 102. Ill. VII, 2 and IX). The site of Sadyr-Kurgan is located 55 km west of Ak-Tobe Talassky and 30 km southeast of Taraz.

Thus, we have a relatively compact group of locations in the eastern part of the Chuy Valley, between the extreme points of which are 55 km apart in a straight line (Peri-Pishpek and Burana cemeteries), and two points on the Issyk-Kul coast, which can conditionally be combined into a separate group. In a western and north-western direction from the eastern Chuy area, the nearest points of Christian artifacts are located 60 km in a straight line on the map – the Shish-Tyube and Ak-Tobe Stepninskoye ancient settlements, respectively. Both of them are still in the Chuy Valley; there are 45 km between them in a straight line. In the east-northeast direction in a straight line on the map to the aforementioned site of Talgar there are 170–175 km. In a southern direction, the famous Christian artifacts were located in the area of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the China, in 350–400 km.

We do not have enough data to explain the development of the phenomenon of these two areas in one particular hypothesis. On the one hand, it would be illogical to suggest that Christians did not settle in the middle area of the Chuy Valley in the Middle Ages. So, it is only a matter of the degree of researching the territories around the eastern Chuy group of monuments. However, amateurs who "randomly" search for archaeological metal artifacts have also visited numerous sites between Bishkek and Merke, but there is no reported information about their discovery of Christian artifacts. At the present we prefer, having posed this question, to leave it open.

Chronology of artifacts. The issue of dating Christian artifacts of Kyrgyzstan is quite problematic both for individual excavated areas, which we tried to show above in the relevant places, and for the categories of artifacts and their collections in separate locations. This is largely due to the nature of their origin – many artifacts were found outside the excavations and, therefore, do not have an archaeological context that helps regarding chronology. And the number of artifacts obtained during excavations is insignificant for reliable dating by method of analogy.

This inquiry is not absolutely hopeless, however, and there are local and preliminary solutions. To date and comprehend the Christian artifacts of the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) cemetery, it is possible to base them upon following facts. According to the coin finds, the village is dated to the period from the middle of the 11th to the second half of the 14th

century, and notably the earliest coins; i.e. there were not many pre-Mongol coins, indicating underdevelopment of the settlement in this period. Other categories of artifacts from the village, including ceramics, were not subjected to special analysis. Fragments of ceramics that we have seen also allow us to date the presence of a small fraction of glazed ware as indicative of the late 11th – early 12th centuries, with a later form that dominates up to the Timurid Period. On the gravestone epitaphs, researchers (not distinguishing the stones apart from Peri-Pishpek and Burana cemeteries) translated the dates as mainly between 1255 and 1342 (Slutsky 1889, p. 17), although the earliest of them seems to date to 1251 (Chwolson 1895, p. 118), and the latest one – to 1373 (Slutsky 1889, p. 17). Such dating of graves fits well [with our knowledge] about the existence of the villages / cities. But this leads to the assumption that their foundations were not directly connected with the Christians but was a consequence of the flourishing urban environment of the Karakhanid era. The Christian community appeared in it later, but took a dominant position, which allowed the formation of a cemetery, upon which no obvious non-Christian burials were revealed; even those two burials described above in the Hill C, which were situated in a sitting position, and are clearly contrary to Christian practice, but were accompanied by stones with crosses.

Some of the pectoral crosses from private collections, were found on this site, according to the information accompanying them; likewise, the cross found long ago by N. N. Pantusov (Fig. 1), as well as the fold of the cross-encolpion (Stavskaya et al. 2013, p. 87). These examples typologically are exceptional and cannot serve as references when dating the other crosses by analogy. But they are considered to be synchronous with the Christian cemetery. The casted crosses (that are round in section) were also found here. Generally, the Christian monuments of the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) village, including the cemetery, appear to be a chronologically unified group that functioned within the framework of one cultural community continuously and without serious interruptions.

A close justification for dating should be given to the Christian artifacts of Burana. During the early 10th century, the Burana ancient settlement was already largely populated, where Islam, based on the recorded monuments and their location in the shahristan itself, was dominant. However, the Christian gravestones, as mentioned above, are dated to the mid-13th – mid-14th century, i.e. a time when the past greatness of this city was somewhat a thing of the past.

Muslims continued to live in its center, burying their dead separately in the territory of shahristan. Probably, the Christian community at this time (mid-13th – mid-14th centuries) was segregated, south of shahristan.

The issue with Burana's pectoral crosses is somewhat more complicated than the case of Peri-Pishpek. The fact is that, typologically, they fit well into the group of flat casted crosses with flaring ends and a delineated outline, widely represented in collections from the sites of Krasnaya Rechka and Ak-Beshim. But according to available actual data, by the mid-13th century Ak-Beshim was already abandoned (see below), which means that the

Burana crosses should be dated to an earlier period. However, what prevented this type from continuing to exist further, after the collapse of the culture that gave rise to it? (!)

Note that archival documents of the 19th century link the Burana cemetery to a group of surviving hills, in which may contain buried religious buildings. In the future, this assumption can be tested archaeologically.

The Christian monuments of the ancient settlement of Ak-Beshim are dated with certainty. The archaeological site itself, according to excavated data, existed in the Karakhanid era for the most part, but by the time the Mongols arrived, it had already ceased to function in the early 13th century. The most recent excavations of the complex of Christian churches, that were partially uncovered as we noted above, is reliably dated to the Karakhanid Period – the 10th–11th centuries, and probably continued to function in the 12th century.

The church, excavated in shahristan-2, dates back to no earlier than the third quarter of the 8th century (see above), which does not exclude the possibility of its original construction at the turn of the 2nd millennium. If accepting the thesis proposed by V. Klein, regarding the relocation of the congregation from one building, which was too small, to a new [larger] location within shahristan-1, and the transformation of the previous site into a cemetery, we are provided with an additional argument for the later dating of the new site. And this means that the burial no. 15, in which the pectoral cross was found, was synchronous with the complex of Christian churches, and, accordingly, the type of casted crosses (round in section) occurred during the 10th–12th centuries. However, this type could have appeared earlier.

Thus, it can be assumed that the Ak-Beshim Christian artifacts – both obtained in the excavations and those found "accidentally" – reflect mainly the 10th–12th centuries or to a slightly earlier time.

Christian artifacts from the site of Krasnaya Rechka are perhaps the most diverse. There is dating proposed for many of them, some of which are disputed by experts. The earliest date is given for a flat casted pectoral cross found in a row [of burials] at the necropolis – the 8th century (Fig. 27). As we have already noted, the data presented in publications are not sufficient for indisputable dating. But they also do not allow excluding it either.

Another artifact is quite clearly dated – a fragment of a ceramic plaque-relief (Fig. 45). It is attributed to the 10th–12th centuries. Moreover, such a date follows from the technological features which V. D. Goryacheva considered, but did not understand (Goryacheva 2010, Fig. 122), and by analogy with the Ak-Beshim plaques from the complex of Christian churches.

To the same dating – 10th–12th century – belongs the *khum* with a Sogdian Christian inscription. This results from the observations of philologists on paleography, and by analogy with the inscription on the *khum* from the complex of Christian churches in Ak-Beshim.

A similar date – the second half of the 11th century or the 12th century – was proposed for a fragment of fired brick with an epitaph and the image of a cross (Fig. 3). Let us recall

that the find was accidental. A. Y. Borissov notes that the letters' typography are very close to the epitaphs on the stones datin to the 13th–14th centuries, i.e. they may be a bit later than the proposed date (Borissov 1963, p. 56).

Two gravestones found at the citadel in the foundation of the residence are dated, according to different interpretations: (1) to the end of the 8th and early 10th centuries (Goryacheva 1988, pp. 64–65) or (2) the early 12th and the end of the 13th centuries (Klein 2000, pp. 163–165). Typologically, the second interpretation is preferable. In the first interpretation, these two stones appear to be the earliest in the Chuy Valley, forming a temporal gap between them and subsequent stones, which seems to us unlikely. Since the archaeological materials from the residence, within its foundation where the stones were found, have not been published, it is impossible to use an archaeological argument. The solution to the existing dilemma was provided in the new interpretation of these stones, that gave a detailed argumentation for the basis of its conclusions. Regardless of their dating, it remains indisputable that the stones were reused. It is logical to assume that the cemetery from which they were taken for construction purposes was located somewhere nearby. And it should be emphasized: in both cases, it turns out that the age of the gravestones varies by more than a century – by 120 or 180 years! This is the earliest possible period when the cemetery utilized [for burials].

The most recent discovery of gravestones from the Krasnaya Rechka, found 2.5–3 km from the citadel on the eastern outskirts of the ancient settlement, are still undated. Only one of them has a partially preserved inscription giving hope for accurate dating after its analysis. Typically, *kairaks* can be, on a preliminary basis, dated to the mid-13th – mid-14th century. Near the place of their find in 2004, we found a fragment of a ceramic vessel with an image of an equilateral cross drawn before firing (Fig. 28). Based on the ceramic profiles, the features of molding and mass, and the characteristics of firing, we associate this fragment between the 12th–14th centuries.

By intuitively dating "accidentally" found crosses in the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement to the 10th–12th centuries, we cannot exclude the possibility of their appearance on the site one or two centuries earlier, as well as being present on its territory up until the 14th century. In general, the issue of dating crosses should remain open until at least some stratified finds are obtained.

We summarize the generalized dating of Christian artifacts of the Krasnaya Rechka ancient settlement in the following way. First, the presence of artifacts of the 10th–12th centuries is undoubted. Second, it is likely that the collection of artifacts, mainly found on the eastern outskirts of the city, date to the 12th–14th centuries. Third, the presence of Christian artifacts of the 8th–9th centuries are not excluded.

Also chronologically, the Novopokrovskoye group of Christian artifacts is rather diverse. The inscription on the *khum* is the most accurately and reliably dated case (Fig. 43.2) – to the 10th–12th centuries. The gravestone (Fig. 38) typologically can be attributed to the 13th–14th

centuries. There are no clear criteria for dating the miniature stone medallion with an image of the monk (Fig. 39.3), as well as its attribution along with other associated Christian artifacts. It is significant, at least, for being a singular example of an anthropomorphic image decorating a Christian artifact known in this region. The only thing that comes to mind is the cross-encolpion from Kara-Jigach which is dated to the 13th century by analogy.

The date of manufacture of the silver jug with embossing, as well as the whole set of dishware (Fig. 2), is referred to by B. I. Marshak to the 7th–8th centuries (Marshak 1971, p. 91). However, such metal vessels can remain in use for a long time, and the embossing of Christian symbols on them could be done in phases. Based on this notion, the 7th–8th century date should be taken as *terminus post quem* for the complex, i.e. not excluding possible later dates. From the summarized information above it follows that the eastern Chuy group of medieval Christian objects and sites are divided into two chronological subgroups: the 10th–12th and 12th–14th centuries. However, it cannot be excluded that Christians appeared here earlier – in the 8th century.

There is nothing special to say about the Issyk-Kul group. The translated stone has the date of 1642 according to the "chronology of Khan Aleksander" (Kokovtsov 1909, p. 788), i.e. which translates to the year 1310. It fits well with the dating of all Christian gravestones of Kyrgyzstan and the surrounding territories.

It is difficult to date those artifacts from the Kurmenty settlement and the surrounding area [just northeast of Issyk-Kul]. For example, we know there are a few pectoral crosses and the one silver reliquary box (with soldered appliqué conveying Christian ornamental motifs). However we cannot be certain about the chronology of the ancient settlement of Kurmenty because: our artifact typology is undeveloped; the artifacts' provenances were based on ambiguous information; and there is simply insufficient data to draw a conclusion. Nevertheless, two casted crosses were found here: one that was round in section and another that was a flat equilateral cross with flared ends [known in English as the "Greek cross" or in Russian "корсунчик"] (Stavskaya et al. 2013, p. 87). The latter can be dated to the 13th–14th centuries by analogy with the crosses from the territory of European Russia, and the first is compared with the analogue from the Peri-Pishpek cemetery, as well as from the Christian church at Ak-Beshim.

Thus, the Issyk-Kul group of Christian artifacts seems to belong entirely to the 13th–14th centuries.

Written sources provide minor additional information about medieval Christianity in Kyrgyzstan. Although a significant number of reports were indirectly related to the territory of the country, quite a few were specific to the location (Kolchenko 2002, pp. 170–178).

Chronologically, the first of them belongs to Narshakhi (899–959), who in his *History of Bukhara*. reported that there was a mosque in the city of Mirki, located within the building of a previous church (Bartold 1996, p. 269). A little later, Al-Maqdisi, who lived

in the second half of the 10th and early 11th centuries, reported that after the seizing of the city of Taraz in 893–894 by Emir Ismail Samani, the "main church" was turned into a cathedral mosque (Bartold 1996, p. 269). In other words, these authors recorded the presence of Christians in the west of the Chuy Valley and the city of Taraz at the end of the 9th century.

The medieval historian of the church Amr ibn Matta, writing in Syriac, listed the Nestorian metropolises of the mid-14th century. This list included Herat, Merv, Samarkand, Turkestan, Tangut, and what he calls the metropolises of *khalluhs* and "Nevaket and Kashgar" (Bartold 1996, p. 285). Moreover, in the latter case, the understanding is not entirely ambiguous – it was spoken about as one or two different metropolises. But in the lists of participants in the Nestorian synods for the period between the 5th and the mid-7th centuries, there were still no Central Asian representatives indicated (Bartold 1996, p. 261). However, these reports have little to do with chronology – the lists only record metropolises that existed between the 7th and 14th centuries. Note that the localizations of the *khalluhs* on the list – as well as the "Turkic tribes" addressed to them in a letter by the Nestorian patriarch (Catholicos) Timothy I (778–823) – are very problematic (Kolchenko 2002, pp. 175–176).

The 13th-century author Atâ-Malek Juvayni (1226–1283) reported that before the "seduction to idolatry", many Naimans led by their leader Kuchluk were Christians. In 1205 (or 1208), the Naimans moved from the Irtysh valley to Balasagun, and in 1213 seized power there (Bartold 1996, p. 288). The latest account regarding Christianity was provided by Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yazdi, who died in 1454. In the introduction to his essay, this author, speaking of events on the eve of the Mongol conquest, is certain that the daughter of the last Kara-Khitan *gurkhan*, from the family of Yelü Dashi, was a Christian, who became the wife of the leader of the Naimans – Küchlük (Bartold 1996, p. 285). The last two passages are important in terms of information about the influx of the Christian population into the Chuy Valley at the end of the 12th – early 13th centuries.

History of medieval Christianity in Kyrgyzstan. From all of the above information, it follows that at the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennia Christianity was one of the religious systems practiced in the Chuy Valley. This is evidenced by the monumental buildings in cities, and in their central areas, within the walls of the fortress (e.g. the churches of Ak-Beshim). Chuy-Valley Christians used the Sogdian language and alphabet (e.g. benevolent inscriptions on *khums*) in everyday life, but inscriptions were also written in Syriac letters on religious objects (cross and molds for plaques from Ak-Beshim). To identify themselves as Christians, they wore pectoral (and sewn on –?) crosses. These were casted (flat and round in section) or impressed onto coins (and other suitable pieces of bronze), and occasionally carved in stone (including jade). Christians buried their dead both in urban necropolises (Krasnaya Rechka) and had separate cemeteries (Ak-Beshim). But it seems that individualized epitaphs were not carved [at these sites]; burials were rarely accompanied by pectoral crosses.

Some objects (Novopokrovsky silver jug) make it possible to assume that there was an earlier spread of Christianity into the Chuy Valley. But available facts do not allow speaking more precisely about the time of this penetration, and its intensity and nature. At the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennia, and particularly for the previous era, there are no factual data – neither written sources nor artifacts – to expand the geography of Christianity outside the Chuy Valley to other areas across modern Kyrgyzstan's borders.

In the 12th–13th centuries, the situation changed. On the one hand, we have written sources about the influx of a new Christian population via the Kara-Khitans and Naimans who came from the east and northeast. On the other hand, archaeological data provide a number of significant changes. Life declined in large settlements during the 13th century, when Christian artifacts are found on the periphery outside the central ruins (Krasnaya Rechka and Burana) and within ancient settlements – the remains of villages without fortifications (Peri-Pishpek / Kara-Jigach). However, the geography has expanded and extends to the Issyk-Kul basin (cemeteries on the Juuka River and the Kurmenty ancient settlement and its neighborhood). This is also confirmed in the cartographic material – the image on the *Catalan Atlas* of 1375, on the western edge of sheet 6 of which there is a building with two towers (bells towers –?) crowned with crosses. Moreover, this image is near the lake, on the southern shore (sic!); beside it there is an explanatory inscription: "This place is called Isikol. In this area there is a monastery of Armenian brothers, where, as they say, there are (burials) the remains of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew" (Klein 2003, p. 322).

We do not have any archaeological evidence for public Christian buildings. But this does not exclude their discovery in the future. In some Christian cemeteries, within pit burials of one individual there were included two or three other interments near the entrance with a separate place for each of them. Moreover, mausoleums were built over several deceased persons. Both phenomena, in our opinion, speak of changes in their social stratification of society – the increasing importance of the family, generation, and tribe. At the same time, there are individual epitaphs executed in Syriac letters. It is noteworthy that the language of the inscriptions were not only Syriac, but also Turkic and Syro-Turkic; this is evidence of a change in the dominant language. At the same time, the analysis of a group of skulls from the Peri-Pishpek (Kara-Jigach) cemetery directed by G. F. Debets came to this conclusion – that the burials included the Pamir-Ferghana anthropological type, as well as the Mongoloid hybrid which was no different than that of the "Wusuns" of the same region (Debets 1948, pp. 283–284). Pectoral crosses were also a characteristic of the period, but they were not usually placed in the burials.

During the second half of the 14th century, the Christian history of Kyrgyzstan was disrupted. A powerful impact was inflicted by the plague, as evidenced by the gravestones themselves, but the main catalyst was the general decay of urban life and the transition from a symbiosis of settled lifestyle and nomadism, towards the dominance of the latter.

Photo 1. Bronze pectoral cross. 8th century Necropolis of Kostobe (Jamukat city)

Photo 2. Bronze cylinders of the 12th – early 13th century. Talgar

Photo 3. Fragment of a ceramic vessel with crosses. Ancient settlement of Antonovka (Kayalyk city)

Photo 4. Ceramic mug. 7th–9th centuries Ancient settlement of Kuiryktobe (Keder city)

Photo 5. Christian from the excavations of the complex of Christian churches of the Ak- Beshim ancient settlement)

Photo 6. Silver vessel with stamps of crosses at the bottom. Novo-Pokrovka village

Photo 7. Stone product with the image of cross from the vicinity of the Osh city. Funds of NIAMK Sulaiman-Too

Photo 8. Pectoral crosses made of coins. Random finds. City of Bishkek

Photo 9. Pectoral crosses round in section. Random finds. Private collections of Bishkek city

Photo 10. Pectoral crosses flat in section. Random finds. Private collections of Bishkek city

Photo 11. Coin from Bukhara Sogdia. Obverse

Photo 12. Coin from Bukhara Sogdia. Reverse

Photo 13. Afrasiab. Image of pigeons on the bowl
10th–11th centuries

14. Pendant. Samarkand Sogd

Photo 15. Samarkand region. Bronze pendant in the form of a fish. End of the 10th–11th centuries

Illustrations Uzbekistan

Photo 16. Pendant from the ancient settlement of Kanka

Photo 17. Kish Church

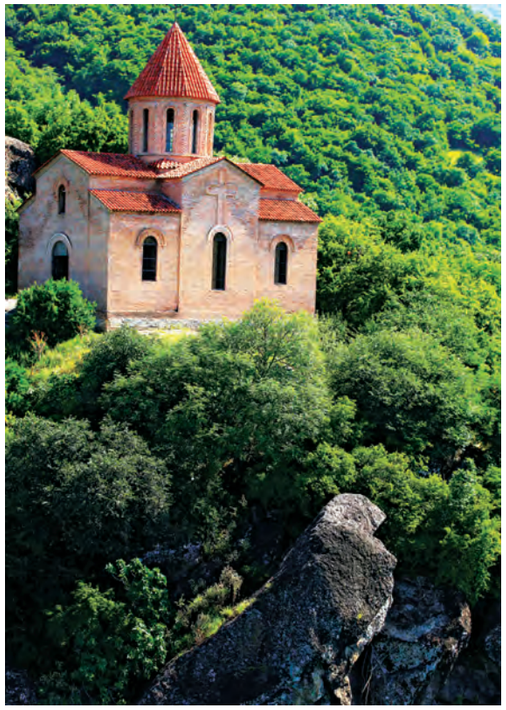

Photo 18. Kyurmyuk Church

Photo 19. Agoglan Church

Photo 20. Keshikchidag Monastery. Frescoes

Photo 21. Albanian Church of St. Jacob in Jerusalem

Photo 22. Bronze pendant. Khujbala

Transoxiana-Maverannahr: Christianity and Manichaeism

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Introduction. After establishing itself as a world religion, Christianity began to spread within the territory of Transoxiana, later Maverannahr, which is now part of Uzbekistan, already by the first half of the first millennium A. D. The history of expansion here is closely connected with the history of the Christian church, as well as with the political and cultural history of the peoples of the Middle East, especially Iran. Since the time of existence of Qumran community, there was a whole range of problems that accompanied the penetration of new teachings into various regions of the ancient world. It is difficult to understand how a small and isolated community could provide such a powerful surge of spirituality with worldwide significance. Apparently, it was formed by a humanistic and civilizing doctrine, delivered to enlightened minds of the oppressed population of the Roman Empire, and subsequently to the widest circles of different tribes and peoples beyond. The Great Silk Road was situated to foster relatively favorable conditions for the cooperation between the four largest powers of antiquity – imperial China in the East, Parthia, Sasanian Iran, and the Roman Empire in the West – thus, Central Asia played a central role in world economic relations (Buryakov 1999, p. 11).

It has been recognized long time ago that Christian doctrine spread along ancient caravan routes, otherwise it is difficult to understand its wide expansion into Central Asia (Bartold 1964, pp. 280–283; Vladimir 2011, pp. 33–34; Buryakov 1999, pp. 11–12; ibid 1994, pp. 19–24; Buryakov, Baipakov, Tashbayeva, and Yakubov 1999; Kobzeva 2000. p. 15–16; Yagodin and Khojayov 1970, p. 152 and others). Significant routes of the Great Silk Road crossed various territories of Uzbekistan – the heart of Transoxiana – in various historical periods. Caravanserais, rural settlements, and cities arose and flourished through trade at the particular intersections.

Many of these became considerably large; they played a vital role in transportation of commodities and so they were widely known along the entire Great Silk Road, from the depths of China to the Mediterranean.

The very concept of “the Silk Road” is generally a conditional designation of a whole system of international routes. Of course, the intensity of trade and exchange on different

routes was different, having a definite effect on the commodity-money exchange relationship and the standard of living of the local population (Masson 1990, pp. 14–15). Trade was an important incentive for city formation. Over time, small trading posts eventually turned into large trans-shipping centers and places of production and storage of goods. Gradually, this process resulted in the formation of a community of townspeople and villagers engaged only in trade (Negmatov and Rakhimov 1990, pp. 118–119). This process can be traced at archaeological sites.

In recent years, large-scale excavations have been carried out in Uzbekistan in almost all regions of the republic, and this has caused a rise in its citizens' interest in their past, full of various historical events. Archaeological excavations and observations at new construction sites are widespread; for over two decades, there has been local expeditions working together with the largest archaeological institutions of Europe, Asia and America. Especially significant are the results obtained during archaeological work, pertaining to the study and the dating of the most famous cities located along the routes of the Great Silk Road, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Karshi, Shakhrisabz, Tashkent, Margilan and others.

Manichaeism or Manichaeism – one of the world religions – was created in the 3rd century by a native of Mesopotamia named Mani. Little is known about the founder of this religion.

Researchers commonly believe that he was born in the year 216, came from a Parthian family, and was brought up in a Judeo-Christian environment. Therefore, it is no coincidence that he considered Christ, Zarathushtra, and Buddha as his forerunners, and later identified himself as completer of this series of prophets, which began with the first man – Adam. At the end of his life, Mani took an extremely bold step – he tried to persuade the Iranian kings to join his faith, but failed and died in prison in 276 or 277. He left behind a number of works in his native Aramaic language and a clear organization with a hierarchical structure.

The basis of the newly created religion was the ancient idea of dualism – the struggle between good and evil. Most likely, Mani adopted this idea from Christianity. The ethics of the Manichaeans was the desire to separate the light (a spiritual principle dispersed throughout the world) from the low physical matter. In practice, this was expressed in strict celibacy, prohibition of social activities, and many dietary rules for its "elect" (clergy and monks); however, there was less stringent rules for the "auditors" (laity). These rules are still accepted by some modern Christian Catholics. In addition, the Manichaeans were negatively inclined towards the material world. That is why there are practically no traces left by them in Sogdia, though there are some written records that survive.

The geography of the Manichaean religion during its golden age was extremely widespread, covering parts of the Mediterranean, Central Asia, India, and China. Moreover, in the south-east of China the religion developed to such a point that it formed a distinct sect. In the year 762, the ruler of the steppe empire of the Uighurs Begu-Kagan adopted

Manichaeism as their official religion, and it survived in some places of the former empire until the beginning of the 11th century, if not later.

Traces of Manichaeism exist in the Altai Mountains, where the Manichaeans began to settle at the end of the 8th century. At this time, Manichaean brick churches were constructed in Khakassia, which were discovered and studied by the notable scientist L. R. Kyzlasov. With the arrival of this religion along the Yenisei River valley, came the introduction of the earliest Yenisei script used in private religious inscriptions; eventually this script ceased and, eventually, it developed into a new form which was more conspicuous – the runic writing found on public monuments. Manichaeism was mainly responsible for the development of the Yenisei runic script.

This religion assigned a special role to human beings who are conscious of the changeable and contradictory world. Their culture centered on book-knowledge and they diligently spread literacy among its adherents. Libraries and education classes were offered at each Manichaean temple. The Manichaean church everywhere conducted its activities in the national languages of its local congregations and, at the time, the only one in used in northern Central Asia was the runic script of the Turkic peoples. Manichaean texts on paper, written in Turkic runes, were found by German expeditions in East Turkestan. The arrival of Manichaeism into Siberia led to the first evidential appearance of an educated class – an ancient Turkic intelligentsia – these were professionally trained people who assumed the mission to produce spiritual, scholarly, and literary writing.

As for Central Asia, in the Ephthalitic-Turkic period (5th–8th centuries), Manichaeism played a adversarial role towards Buddhism by pushing it aside. Manichaeism accepted much from Buddhism, including religious practice, so much so that the local population often confused the Buddha with Mani. Manichaean monasteries appeared as the result of the influence of Buddhism in Central Asia. At the end of the 7th century, Manichaeism's large influence is exemplified by the fact that a Manichaean preacher from Sogdia, a representative of the upper class, arrived at the household of the Chinese emperor. For a long time, both of these religious movements coexisted throughout Sogdia. It is difficult to say how these religions got along with each other, since the historical sources do not contain information on this subject, but the dynamic activity of Mar Ammo (the founder of Manichaeism in Central Asia) in recruiting representatives of the ruling class, and through them the subordinate population, demonstrates a tense competition between religions, especially since another strong rival appeared on the ideological arena – Christianity.

Regarding back Sogdia, the famous orientalist V. B. Henning stated that the main representatives of Manichaeism in Central Asia were the Sogdians (Henning 1938, pp. 13–14). This is somewhat confirmed by the fact that in the first half of the 8th century the head of the Manichaeans moved to Samarkand, where he established his residence (Litvinsky, Zeymal 1971, p. 121). In particular, the presence of a dormitory or monastery of Manichaeans in Samarkand is reported in the geography of Khudud al-Alam (Lurie 2013, p. 229). In the

first half of the 8th century, in one of the decrees of the Chinese emperor, Mani's teaching was called the "native religion of Western Khu" which, in the opinion of researchers, did not imply the general inhabitants of Central Asia, but namely Sogdians.

Written sources of the Samanid period report about the existence of eight gates in Samarkand in the wall of Devar-i Kiyamat surrounding its rabad. Some of them were called Isbask, because through them there was a road to the village of Isbiskat. It was located in two *farsakhs* [a Persian unit of measurement that is about 10 kilometers or 6 miles] from Samarkand and is identified with the fortress of Durmontepa (Rostovtsev and Ivanitsky 1976, p. 540). Analyzing the works of medieval geographers Ibn Haukal, al-Istahri and al-Mukaddasi, P. B. Lurie concluded that the Manichaean center in Samarkand could be located in Isbask-Isbiskat (Lurie 2013, p. 229).

No reliable archaeological traces left by the Manicheans in Sogdia yet known. Perhaps there were not monumental temples here, but buildings made of *pakhsa* (compressed earth) or even felt, since the brotherhood did not need any special facilities. Likewise, a similar absence of monumental architecture is noted in the Altai Mountains. But once again, regarding Sogdia, or especially Afrasiab, in 2002, at the northern part of the city, an Uzbek-French expedition uncovered a residential complex of the city nobility dating to the late 7th–8th centuries. Among familiar items, the archaeologists found a unique housing estate – all of its rooms were covered with *ganch* coating [clay and gypsum plaster]: walls, floors, thresholds, and even the ceiling. At the same time, the ganch did not contain any impurities and expressed an amazing brilliant surface. In addition, there were no facilities found in the premises that were common for ordinary dwellings: there were no sufas, niches, or hearths. And there were practically no artifacts found therein associated with this period – that is something that requires further study. Were these premises, perhaps, a dwelling of the Manichaeans in urban environment? After all, its decoration was consistent with the Manichaean doctrine of the simplicity of life and the negation of all material things. And the dating fits and, more importantly, it is located within an area of Samarkand, directly referenced by the historical sources concerning the existence of the Manichaean community. The uniqueness of the discoveries at Afrasiab was overshadowed when a similar dwelling, also dating back to the late 7th – early 8th century, was excavated in Jizak.

Unfortunately, the nature of the negative evidence undermines the definite identification of these sites, simply because Manichaeism taught about the sinfulness of everything material [and archaeology, by definition, is the study of material evidence].

Christianity and Manichaeism, along with Buddhism, strengthened the cultural exchange between the peoples of Western and Central Asia, including India, which continues to be the case in the present day. The main sect of Christianity in Central Asia was Nestorianism, which already at its early stages experienced several periods of prosperity and decay associated with various political events. Two events significantly influenced the entire course of Nestorian expansion. In 431, the Ecumenical Council took place in Ephesus, when

Nestorianism was recognized as heresy, and a large stream of Nestorians immigrated to the East, conflicting with the Melkite Christians who had settled there a little earlier. According to researchers, the Orthodox Melkites owned a small monastery in Merv, which existed from the 4th to 6th centuries and was abandoned as a result of pressure from the Nestorians (Dresvyanskaya 1968, p. 12). It is possible that some of the Melkite Christians moved along the ancient caravan road from Merv and eventually settled in Khorezm.

Bactrian and Sogdian traces of Christianity were mention much earlier than the arrival of the first recorded missionaries. According to some scholars, the note about Christians "among the Kushan" as written in the Syriac *Book of the Laws of Countries* refers to Kushan Bactria (Nikitin 1984, p. 123). Scientists believe that by the 3rd century, Christians had progressed beyond Sogdia and Bactria (Bogomolov, Buryakov, and Zhukova et al. 1994, p. 12). According to legend, as reflected in some sources, the body of the apostle and evangelist Matthew was brought from Syria and buried by fleeing Christians in the 2nd or 3rd centuries near the Issyk-Kul Lake (Ploskikh 2003, p. 80; Vladimir 2011). When immigrating into Semirechye, they must have also settled in the territory of Transoxiana. For example, the grave of the patriarch Job, whom Muslims call Ayyub, in Urgench (Khorezm) is still revered by Christians today.

During a time of political stability in Central Asia, the Turkic Khaganate formed. This resulted in the revival of international trade along the caravan routes and this laid the groundwork for the missionary activity of the Nestorian church. Christian doctrines penetrated into the nomadic environment. According to historical sources, Patriarch Yeshuyab II (628–643) contributed to the creation of metropolises at a number of cities, including Samarkand. The latter is very important, since the creation of the metropolitan seat would have been preceded by an episcopate, which testifies to a rather long and stable Christian tradition in Sogdia (Nikitin 1984, pp. 124–125).

Christian migrants into Sogdia brought materials related to their rites and traditions. For example, among the discoveries there is an ampulla with an image of St. Mina. An ampulla is a small ceramic flask with two handles. This artifact has two flattened sides in a round shape; in one of them there an impression depicting the saint with two camels at his feet, and two equal-arm crosses were placed over his shoulders. Such flasks were made in the monastery of St. Mina in Egypt to hold curative water from the monastery spring in the 6th–7th centuries (Zalesskaya 1986, p. 182). Was this custom, perhaps, borrowed by Muslims when they collected holy water from the Zamzam Well [at Mecca] in special vessels and carried it in their residences?

Christianity spread quite intensively into the territory of Transoxiana in the 6th century and later. Symbols, in the form of Nestorian crosses, appear on the coins of Ustrushana, Sogdia, and Chach (Smirnova 1963, p. 135; ibid 1981, p. 334 and ff.; Rtveladze, Tashkhojayev, and Fedorov 1974, pp. 145–147; Ivanitsky 1994, p. 65, Tab. 3). Various animals were used as symbols before the appearance of the cross, which became their main sign: such as the lamb

(the symbol of Jesus Christ) and the dove (Holy Spirit). In medieval Europe, Christians borrowed symbols from the divine doctrine of the Savior for their seals, which served as a guarantee that the order approved by the seal would be fulfilled as a sacred vow. The image of the cross was a symbol of redemption; the dove was a sign of innocence; a fish represents the sacred water of baptism; an anchor conveyed the perseverance of faith; and a harp as an instrument of praise to God (Lakier 1990, p. 23). Interpretation of these symbols depended on the local region and may have been different from the canonical definition.

At this time the Sogdians occupied a dominant position in international trade. While they colonized Eastern Turkestan, they also took a direct part in the spreading of Christianity beyond the borders of China. Among the people involved in trade, that is, the Sogdians, there were quite a lot of Christians, who were mostly Nestorians. It is believed that Christianity entered Samarkand even before the establishment of the metropolitan there, which was headed by Patriarch Akhai (410–415) (Nikitin 1984, p. 125). The historical sources also contain information about the Nestorian metropolitan in Samarkand during the first half of the 11th century and the legend about the presence of the church of St. John the Baptist, built in the second quarter of the 13th century (Bartold 1964, p. 290; Nikitin 1984, p. 125).

Later sources of the 10th century report on the existence of a Christian church in Bukhara in the location where the Bani Khanzal mosque stands. In general, this is a common practice for Muslims [to replace earlier religious buildings with mosques]. For example, in Taraz during the reign of Samanids, the local temple was transformed into a mosque. The sources of the 10th century also mention the monastery in the Urgut region (Bartold 1966, p. 258; ibid 1964, p. 279), where a bronze Syriac censer was found (Zalesskaya 1972).

As for archaeological sources, there are five phases for the periodization of the spread of Christianity in Central Asia, starting from the 3rd to 6th centuries up to the 12th–14th (Kolchenko 2003, pp. 54–63). Although, it should be noted, that there are artifacts that testify to functioning Christian communities at a later time (Vladimir 2011; Dickens 2009, pp. 124–130; p. 300, pl. 11). Christian symbolism is quite vividly traced on the ossuaries in various archaeological sites of Sogdia, Khorezm, and Chach (Ivanitsky 1994, pp. 64–68; Yagodin and Khojayov 1970, pp. 146–150; Bogomolov 1994, pp. 73, Fig. 1). Pectoral crosses were found in various areas: near Penjikent in one of the burials of the Dasht-Urdakon burial ground; in the Suleimantepa's basilica; and at one of the monuments of Ferghana (Belenitsky, Marshak, Raspopova, and Isakov 1977, pp. 559–560; Raimkulov and Ivanov 2000, pp. 160–161; *Report of the East Sogdian...*, 2004, p. 5). A. I. Terenozhkin found a bronze Nestorian cross at the ancient settlement of Afrasiab (Terenozhkin 1950, Fig. 72.2). During the excavation of necropolises at Jamukat and Navaket in Kazakhstan, Christians burial places were excavated containing silver and bronze crosses (Baipakov 1994, pp. 97–98).

In the first centuries of the common era, Sogdians expanded into the Semirechye region, where they brought their cultural traditions and writing, as well as, apparently, the Christian

religion (Bernshtam 1940). This is also evidenced by burials constructed according to Christian rites. Later in the 8th century, Christian churches were built in the area (Kyzlasov 1953, pp. 220–223), where Sogdians could practice their construction style as well as their liturgy. Not only were Nestorians present, but also other Christian denominations, mainly Jacobites and Melkites, who took an active part in Christian colonization.

Imprints of seals depicting an equilateral Nestorian cross are present on clay bullae of the 6th–7th centuries from Aktepa in Southern Turkmenistan (Gubayev 1977). There is a similar cross on the bulla and bead from the site of Kuyukkala in Khorezm of the same period (Khojayov and Mambetullayev 2008, p. 142). An interesting inscription was found on a bulla from the site of Kanka in the Tashkent region, where many different objects with the image of crosses were found. The bulla burnt in a fire was found in a temple of the 4th–6th centuries. In the inscriptions on the bulla, as interpreted by the paleo-linguist V. A. Lifshits, were the words "Aspasak Kavatenak". The word *aspasak* is translated as "bishop" or "deacon" – a Christian title, which was also used by the Manichaeans (Buryakov 1999, p. 16).

Nevertheless, the Nestorians were the most widespread [of the Christian groups], forming the so-called "Nestorian empire," of which a significant part of their membership lived in the Central Asian interfluve. In the opinion of Father Vladimir, Christianity in Central Asia had an apostolic origin. By tradition, it is believed that the first apostles who entered here were St. Thomas the Twin and St. Andrew the First-Called. However, it is worth recalling that long before them Job the Long-suffering died in Khorezm, where nowadays his grave is still revered.

In the 6th century, the Central Asian Church accepted the so-called heresy of Nestorianism. The rise of the Nestorians reached such an extent that they were on the verge of creating a "third type Christian empire" covering all of Asia, different from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic powers. According to L.N. Gumilyov, "the thousand-year history of Asia from the Sea of Marmara to the Yellow Sea is the story of the formation and death of the ethno-confessional Nestorian civilization," and further: "The problem of the disappearance of Nestorianism is so complex that it deserves special study" (Gumilyov 1991). The mighty Nestorian church power which rendered such a substantial influence in almost all countries of the Asian continent, and is still remembered, fell into decay in just a few decades. In fact, Nestorianism was a kind of counterbalance to the Byzantine Orthodox Church, which probably survived due to the "intervention" of ancient Russia, which accepted this faith and prevented its collapse. It is no coincidence that after the cessation of Nestorianism for almost four hundred years, there was not a single record regarding the Christian community in Central Asia until its colonization by the Russian Empire (Vladimir 2011, p. 14). However, this is not totally true: clandestine Christianity existed, and persisted precisely in Khorezm which was a country relatively independent from both external and internal enemies, which is seen in archaeological artifacts.

Crosses on pre-Islamic ceramics and their meaning. During the periods of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, Kaunchin culture was widespread in the Syr-Darya regions, in the Zarafshan Valley, and up to Khorezm. One of its distinctive features was the presence of signs on ceramic dishes (Fig. 1). Signs are found on almost all the artifacts of this culture (Gritsina 1984, p. 84, 92–93). Especially common are signs in the form of crosses. Note that scholars should consider them from the position of their relation to Christian symbolism.

As a rule, signs were applied to the clay with some sharp or flattened object before the firing. As can be judged by the impressions in some cases, the instrument was a split reed or a wooden stick. For example, this technique was used when drawing a double cross sign, and with the upper cross being applied with the flattened side and the second, lower one, being drawn with a ruler. Only rarely were signs applied after firing the vessels. Most signs are located in the upper part of the vessels, under the rim; less often, on the top or side of the rim; and very rarely, on the inside of the vessel. Crosses were often placed in a circle or rectangle.

Signs were applied on various vessels, but they prevail on large types of *khum* or *khumcha*. The arrangement of symbols was not strictly placed in a particular area, but allowed on different parts of the vessels. On the one hand, this leads to the assumption that their placement was not significant – i. e. signs did not lose their meaning and "strength," no matter where they were applied, including those at the bottoms of the vessels. On the other hand, it is possible that their location (at the bottom, body, rim) played a specific role,

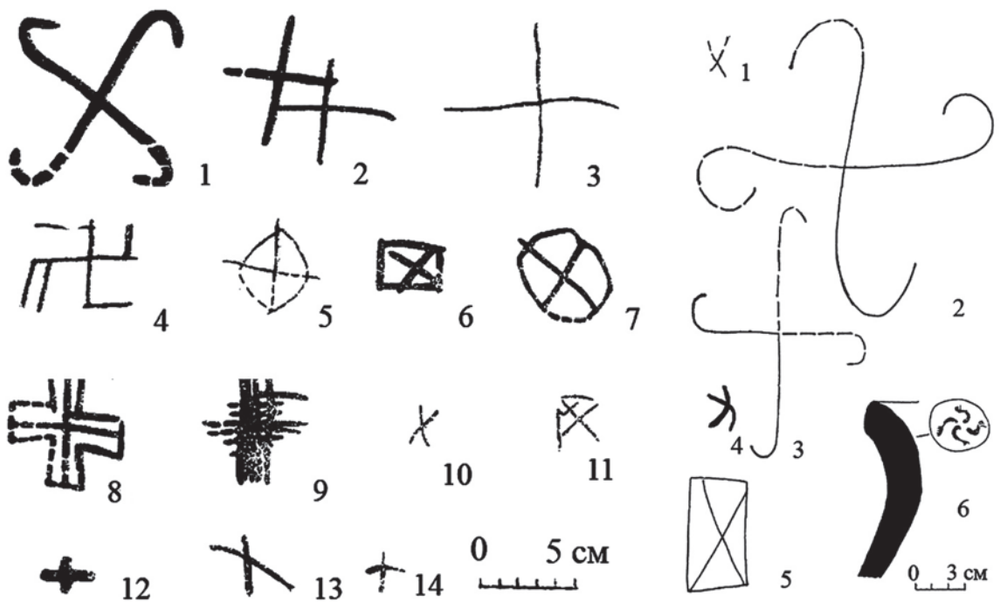


Fig. 1. Signs on pottery of Kaunchin culture

which is still difficult to determine. As a rule, there are no signs placed on vessels with drips and splashes of engobe, or those with various kinds of pasting applied for security purposes. There is also no relationship between the form and quality of ceramic production with and without signs. Most vessels date back to ancient and early medieval times.

But let us turn to signs made in the various form of crosses. G. V. Grigoryev, who first drew attention to the signs of Kaunchi culture, believed that the appearance of signs in the form of swastika reflected evolution in the thinking of the population of Kaunchi: replacing the animal's totem with a cosmic symbol – the sun (Grigoryev 1948, p. 55). Cruciform signs are often found in Ferghana (Litvinsky 1973, Tab. 36.6; Tab. 37.1; Tab. 122.8). According to B. I. Weinberg, it seems possible to relate the appearance of tamga of a solar type in Khorezm with the area of the Middle Syr-Darya, where judging by the numismatic data they developed in the 3rd century AD (Weinberg 1977, pp. 40–41). B. A. Litvinsky associated a sudden increase of the solar symbol in India in the first centuries AD due to the influence of the Saka and Yuezhi who moved there at that time (Litvinsky 1972, p. 154–155). Apparently, the appearance of solar and other symbols on ceramics of Northern Bactria in the first centuries AD can be related to southern influence (Pidayev 1978, p. 39. Fig. 7, Tab. II.11, Tab. VII.3; Turgunov 1973, p. 71, Fig. 16.10, p. 73, Fig. 18.5).

As far as we know, the shape of the cross formed in ancient times, possibly even in the Paleolithic period. By analogy, the cross is formed when two wooden sticks are laid perpendicular to each other, when producing fire by means of friction. Subsequently, two crossed features became a sacred sign, a symbol of the fire-saviour, a symbol of the sun, and eternal life (Neikhardt 1956, pp. 5–14).

The sign of the cross and swastika is often found on dishware of the Bronze Age. The cross is a common motif on ceramics of the Karadepina type (Masson 1964, p. 365; ibid 1960, Tab. XXVII.16–17). According to V. M. Masson, the image of the cross had a magical meaning that protected the vessel's contents (Masson 1964, p. 357). The same opinion is shared by I. N. Khlopin (1962, p. 18). A. K. Margulan calls these signs cruciform *tamga* and notes their wide dissemination in ceramics of the Late Bronze Age of Central Kazakhstan (Margulan 1970, pp. 172–173). Interestingly, a similar fragment of a mug with a depiction of the Nestorian cross was found in Penjikent (Paykova and Marshak 1976, pp. 159–160).

There is no need to list here all the monuments on which cross-shaped signs were applied. They are found everywhere up to the present day. In general, the image of the cross, as in the swastika and within a wheel is considered to be solar symbols (Rapoport 1971, p. 50). However, at least in the culture of Kaunchi, G. V. Grigoryev took the cross as an abstracted image of sheep, which served as amulet (Grigoryev 1940. p. 28). Some researchers call them *tamga*. Indeed, cruciform signs are found among tamgas: for example, as recorded by Rashid-ad-din (Rashida-ad-din 1952, p. 88), Mahmud of Kashgar (Mahmud Kashgar 1939,

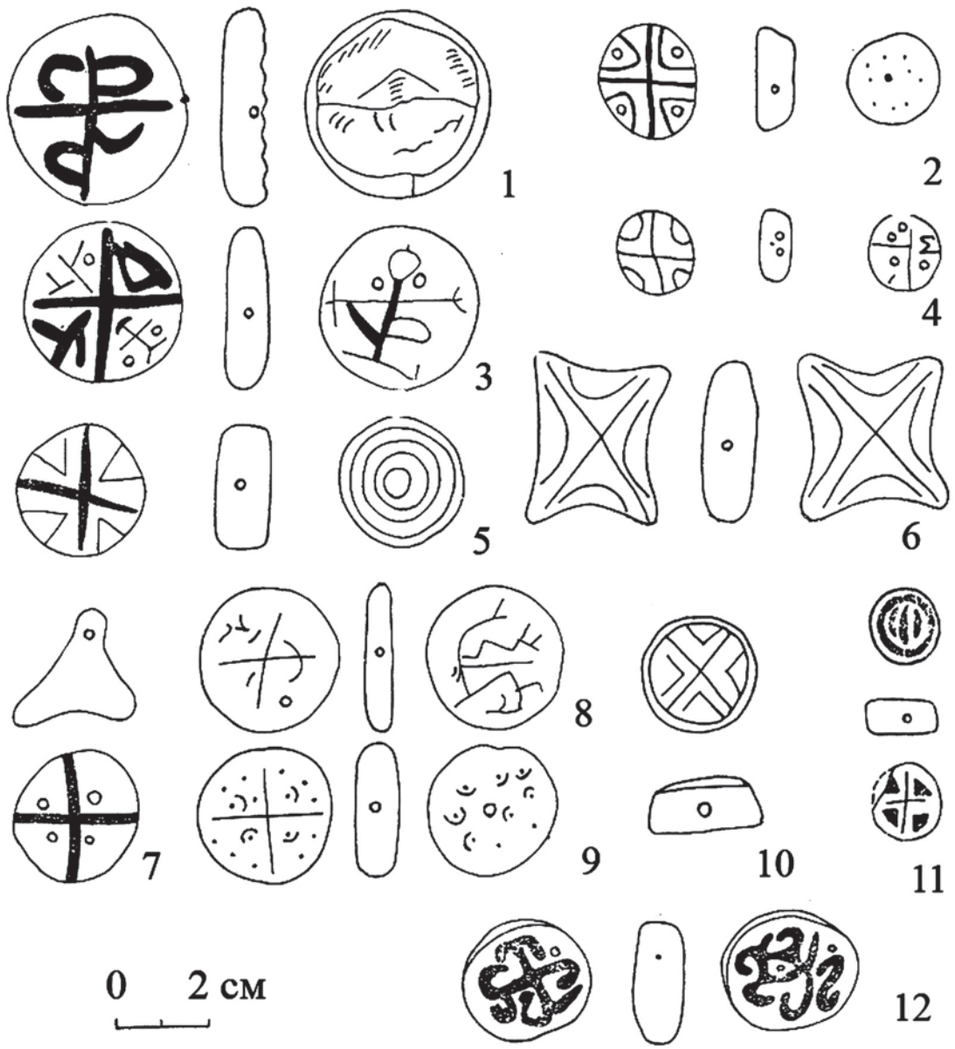


Fig. 2. Cross-shaped signs on the seals-talismans from the monuments of the Tashkent region

p. 309), Abul-Ghazi (Markov 1961, p. 11) and on modern gravestones (Polyakov 1973, p. 190. Tab. XXII. Fig. 5; Khojaniyazov and Khakimniyazov 1997, pp. 28–29).

The ethnographic data has recorded that, among the peoples of Central Asia, the cross symbol represented a schematized human that conveys the image of the spirit which protects a person or a thing from evil spirits and the "evil eye" (Pesherova 1959, p. 112). According to the explanation of M.S. Andreyev, in the belief system of the Tajiks, the swastika is a dragon, a deity; its four ends are identified with four world elements (Pugachenkova 1950, p. 41).

It is interesting to note that many documents from the time of Hammurabi ended with a sign in the shape of the cross, as if blessing the writing (Neihardt 1956, p. 16). Apparently, for the same purpose, the inscription on the ossuary from Tokkala ends with a swastika (Gudkova 1964, Tab. XI.2). The cruciform signs on the coins of some Turkic rulers of Chach can be interpreted as a sign of blessing (*Antiquities of Tuyabuguz* 1978, p. 125; Abdullayev 1975, p. 153). At the same time, the crosses on coins are associated with Byzantine influence (Musakayeva 1994, pp. 42–53). It is common for the cross to be place in front and after inscriptions on Byzantine bricks of the 5th–6th centuries AD (Jacobson 1979, p. 19). Likewise, the sign of the cross was placed before the inscription or other signs on early medieval vessels located around the Northern Black Sea region (Ibid. p. 18, Fig. 5.7). The sign in the form of an equilateral Nestorian cross is depicted on a vessel from the ancient Kugaittepa settlement in Tashkent (Gritsina 1984, p. 86, Fig. 3).

In another category of ceramic products, the so-called "Kaunchi seals," the image of crosses and cross-shaped figures prevail over other figures (Gritsina and Alimov 1986, p. 38, Fig. 1). On the site of Sidak in the Southern Kazakhstan, the treasure contained a "tablet-signet" made of jet, which depicts a cross with corners between its arms – such figures can be called "cross in the cross". In fact, the outer rim of the cross of the Nestorian type forms the corners, and inside it there is a simple equilateral cross. Among the Kaunchi seal-amulets there are several recorded examples (Gritsina and Alimov 1986, p. 38., Figs. 1, 6, 8, 17). It follows that the symbol in the form of a cross was borrowed by Christians not by chance, but considering its antiquity and holiness in the East. Perhaps, Ethiopians who used the cross in their rituals even before the Nativity of Christ played a role in its adoption by Christians.

It should be considered that the image of the cross, as an established Christian symbol, however, could not appear in Central Asia and in other regions before the 5th–6th centuries. It is enough to recall that the early Christians considered the cross as a pagan symbol and despised it. So one of the Christian authors Felix Minucius [d. 250 AD] wrote: "As for the crosses, we do not revere them at all: we do not need them, we are Christians, you are pagans, the wooden idols are sacred for you, you revere wooden crosses, perhaps as part of your deities..." (Neihardt 1975, p. 29). Maybe he had in mind the Ethiopians who bore wooden crosses on poles (Ulyanov 2009, p. 127). Early images of the cross and cross-shaped signs should be associated with the pre- Christian symbols described above. In this regard, it should be mentioned, the Christian symbols on a silver plate (*diskos*, an Eucharist paten used in liturgical ceremonies in Christian churches), which was found on the Black Sea coast and dated back to early 6th century (Pyatnitsky 2013, pp. 295–324, Fig. 6). This example is particularly interesting because Khorezm and the South Russian steppes of the Caucasus were part of the Crimean metropolitan (see below). Although in this case, considering the proximity of the artifact to Byzantium (Abkhazia), it is more appropriate to associate it with the Patriarchate of Constantinople (Pyatnitsky 2013, pp. 303–304).

On the front side of the paten there is an engraved image of a cross atop the hill of Golgotha with four rivers of paradise. On both sides of Golgotha there are two hills, over them is a dove with a branch in its beak. The cross has four arms with expanding branches. The lower branch of the cross is longer than the other three. The cross arms are conveyed by four open lines (Ibid. pp. 307–308, Fig. 6). It should be noted that in the pectoral cross from the Kuva site, the cross arm is marked by the St. George's cross (Raimkulov and Ivanov 2000, pp. 160–161). Under the center of the cross of the described paten, there is a niche with a semicircular arch, denoting "Adam's cave", which is correlated with the tomb of Adam (Pyatnitsky 2013, pp. 313, 315).

The Christian cross is known from various early Christian sources [Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397), Rufinus (345–410), Socrates Scholasticus (c. 380–440), Theodoret of Cyrus (386–457) and others)]. All these references unanimously confirm that the cross was found and unearthed by the saintly evangelist Helena – the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great – considered to be equal to the apostles. The acquisition of this historical church relic (the True Cross) took place in 326 during a trip to Jerusalem, undertaken by Helena with the aim of pilgrimage and search for Christian holy artifacts: "Constantine sent his mother, blessed Helena, with treasures to find the life-giving Cross of the Lord. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, Macarius, met the queen with the proper honor, and together with her searched for the coveted Life-giving Tree" (Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, entry for the year 5817 (324/325).

It is a commonly known fact that the Roman emperors, being pagans, tried to destroy any traces of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For this purpose, on the orders of the emperor Hadrian, Golgotha and the Holy Sepulcher were filled with earth and the temple of Venus and the statue of Jupiter were placed on the artificial hill. Only after three centuries, the great Christian shrines – the Holy Sepulcher and the Life-giving Cross were re-acquired by Christians and opened for veneration. Since then, that is, since the 4th century, the site was sanction as an authentic location for Christian pilgrimage. Images of Jesus crucified on the Cross begin to appear only in the 8th century (*Atheistic Dictionary* 1983, pp. 239–240).[1]

There should be noted another aspect of the Nestorian creed. Nestorian-Christians have played an important role in the preservation and propagation of Greek education and art. Thanks to their devotion, the achievements of the Hellenistic culture were maintained by the population of the Middle East, although in a converted form, and contributed to the art based on Arab and Persian roots (Zalesskaya 2013, p. 337; Pigulevskaya 1979, pp. 30–31).

[1] [Editor's note: The doors of 5th-century church of Santa Sabina in Rome, depict Christ's crucifixion; likewise, the ivory plaque in the British Museum (London) clearly depicts Christ's crucifixion from around the year 425 (Acc. no. 1856, 0623.5). The well-developed *Crucifixion* scene in the Syriac *Rabbula Gospels* (fol. 13a) underscores that there was an early and long tradition by the end of the sixth century (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, codex Pluteus I.56) (C.A.S.).

Christianity in Khorezm. Khorezm is an ancient and medieval region, located in the lower reaches of the Amu-Darya. The archaeological discovery of this amazing region must be credited to the ethnographic expedition led by S. P. Tolstov, who identified and studied dozens of first-class monuments of this "open-air museum". Publications of these materials have long ago become classic textbooks for Central Asia archaeological research (Vinogradov and Itina 1967; Itina 1981; Buryakov and Filanovich 2007; Gritsin and Mambetullayev 2008, pp. 264–267 et al). Medieval authors of the 10th century recorded 33 urban settlements in Khorezm. In addition to Kyat and Gurganj, the largest cities were Mizdakhkan, Dargan, Barategin, Jaz, Jashira, Zarrukh, Kurder, and Jit (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bolshakov 1973, pp. 172–173).

It was known that, since antiquity, Khorezm was separated from other regions because of the impassable sands of the Kyzylkum and Karakum deserts, the harsh waters of the Aral Sea and the anhydrous expanses of Ustyurt; so, as such, it developed a kind of civilization, which was idiosyncratic compared to the civilizations of neighboring regions. This circumstance contributed to the fact that Khorezm remained independent for much longer than surrounding regions, which left an imprint on its material culture as well as its spirit. This also is relevant to Christianity in the region.

The grave of Patriarch Job, whom Muslims call Ayyub, is still revered by Christians in the city of Urgench (Khorezm). This is one of the oldest sites that enshrines the concept of Old Testament righteousness. According to the report of the Latin missionary Pascal, who visited Khorezm in 1335, this pilgrimage destination to Job's tomb was ancient, first visited by Christians and later Muslims. The local population believed that, at the request of this patriarch, God caused clean water to spring from the earth here which brought health to sick people (Vladimir 2011, pp. 29–30).

As noted above, Melkite communities were significantly affected by Nestorians, especially since their communities were few and not very stable in faith. This was especially evident after the Council of Ephesus in 431 years. The Melkites most firmly settled down in Khorezm, where they kept their traditions for a long time and protected the purity of their faith, while in other places in Central Asia their communities practically ceased to exist.

The earliest references to Christianity in Khorezm date back to the 8th century and is suggested on the *Notitiae Episcopatuum* list of bishops, which includes the Doros metropolitan. According to S.P. Tolstov, the reference to the Khval episcopal throne should be considered as Khvalis, that is, Khorezm (Yagodin, Khojayov 1970. pp. 151–152). Al-Biruni mentioned the church when describing the holidays of Christians in Khorezm.

The major center of ancient Orthodox Christianity was Khorezm, which according to early medieval sources had its own diocese within the territory. Its bishops were not assigned from Constantinople, but from Syriac Antioch. In the 7th century, there was

an archbishopric, attached to the Crimean metropolis, this testifies to the conversion to Christianity of not only the residents of Khorezm, but also the inhabitants of the steppe peoples inhabiting the territory from the north of Central Asia to the Caucasus (South Russian steppe).

Necropolis of Mizdakhkan. According to sources of the 10th century, Mizdakhkan was the third largest city of Khorezm, located near Khojeyli mountain (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bolshakov 1973, p. 175). Today we can trace the remains of the ancient city, which consisted of the citadel of Gyaurkala (as it was known during Golden Horde period (*shahar Antakia*), the ruins of individual buildings, urban and suburban aqueducts, agricultural-irrigation systems, and the city cemetery, which was apparently used by entire *rustak* [Persian, "large village"] population. The area of the complex includes more than 200 ha (Yagodin, Khojayov 1970, pp. 6–7; Turebekov 2007, p. 93).

Since the first major publications, Mizdakhkan has essentially become one of the most reference monuments in Central Asia (Yagodin and Khojayov 1970). Long-term excavations resulted in accumulation of a huge, often unique material on the history of the region. Several craft and residential quarters, religious structures, and fortifications have been completely investigated. At the Gyaurkala citadel there was a ruler's palace consisting of 40 rooms (Kdyrniyazov 2007).

The whole Mizdahkan complex is located on three plateaus, distinct from each other. One of these served as a necropolis. Its total area is more than 60 ha and rises to a height of 30 m (Yagodin and Khojayov 1970, pp. 7–8). V. N. Yagodin, the director of the expedition, held the view that Christian teachings was introduced and had spread among the population of Mizdakhkan according to archaeological data by the 7th to the first half of the 8th century. Eight ossuaries from the necropolis display the form of the cross, stars, and figures, which are elements common to Christianity during that period (Fig. 3). In the center of some of the compositions are crosses with four flared arms, with the lower arm being longer than the others (Ibid. 1970, p 146, Fig. 53). That is, the crosses had a second characteristic, which can be classified as a "Byzantine" form with an elongated lower side (Ulyanov 2009. p. 224). Crosses in Central Asia from antiquity to the present had a similar shape, which can be seen on various objects, and this is especially characteristic of pectoral crosses (Borissov 1939, Tab. VI, 1; Ulyanov 2009, p. 224. pp. 258–259; Ivanitsky 1994, p. 65, Tab. 3, 10–11; Musakayev 1994, p. 46, Tab. 2). Crosses of a similar form are often found on ossuaries (Bogomolov 1994, p. 73, Tab. 6, 1–2; Ivanitsky 1994, p. 65, Tab. 3.1–2, etc.). If we look beyond the borders of Khorezm, we see do not find a similar combination of symbols in this period anywhere else.

A curious observation was made by V. N. Yagodin in the process of excavation. A reused ossuary with relief images having Zoroastrian characteristics was found in the burial structure. It shows distinct traces of the deliberate destruction of Zoroastrian symbols.

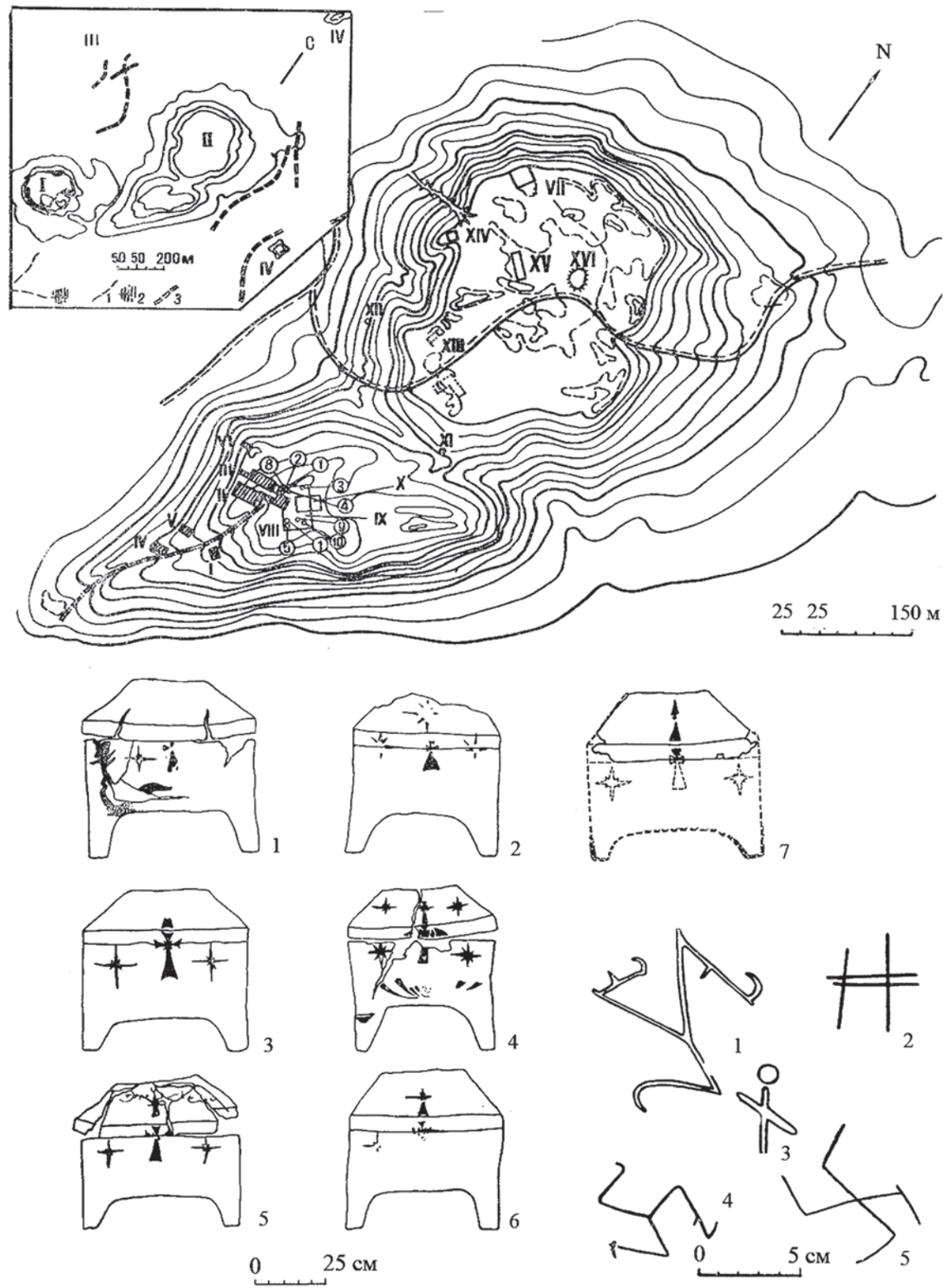


Fig. 3. Plan, ossuaries, and signs on ceramics from the Mizdakhkan ancient settlement

According to the researcher, this was done by newly converted Christians with the goal of destroying the "harmful" magical properties of images (Yagodin and Khojayov 1970, p. 150). It is commonly known that the Arab Muslims did the same, by rubbing out the eyes of Christian saints within early medieval paintings.

There is another important conclusion of this researcher. At one particular burial site, there were found more than one hundred interments, which may have belonged to a quite large Christian community (Yagodin and Khojayov 1970, p. 150). Probably, Mizdakhkan, as one of the largest cities of the region, served as a center for Christian communities in Khorezm.

It was already noted above that there was another large site of Kuyukkala, identified with the capital of the early medieval Kerder (Mambetullayev 2013. pp. 89–92). At that site, there was found a hyperrectangular pendant, made from light-colored stone, decorated with green stripes which also, in our opinion, could relate to Christianity; it measures 1.5 cm in length and 1.0 cm in thickness (Fig. 4). There is a drilled hole in the middle for hanging it. A cross with flared arms was incised on both ends where the carving is flat; they are painted in red and placed on a white background, that is, like crosses on the Mizdakhan ossuaries (Khojayov and Mambetullayev 2008, p. 142, Fig. XLII.4).

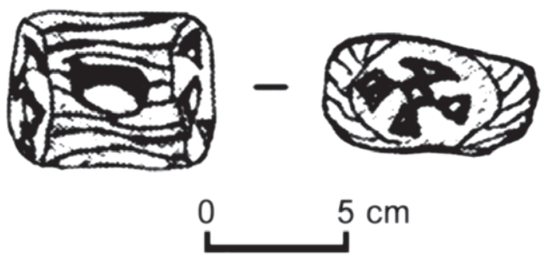


Fig. 4. Stone pendant from the Kuyukkala ancient settlement. 10th–11th centuries

Another artifact from the site of Kerder is interesting in terms of its relationship to Christianity. It is a glazed bowl and on the inside is decorated with a composition with four figures: a bird, a snake, and two fish (Fig. 5). The central figure is the bird; its head has not survived, but the author of the publication believed that this was an image of an eagle. The bowl is dated to the 9th–10th centuries (Mambetullayev 1999, pp. 286–288). However, it is highly possible that the artist tried to depict not a predator, but a dove. If so, then the composition, including three other "figures", which were revered in Christianity from antiquity leads to a logical conclusion. The dove, snake, and fishes are known on Christian artworks from the beginning of its development (Tseren 1976, p. 30).

Other similar artifacts have been found in the region. For example, a straight-arm cross and a cross with curved ends were found on alabaster ossuaries in the early medieval necropolis of Tokkala (Gudkova 1964, p. 94). All these such cities in the early Middle Ages were located on caravan routes and were quite large settlements, attractive for those inclined to spread their religions, including Christianity.

Ancient settlement of Devkesken-kala. As noted above, "clandestine" Christianity, after pogroms and persecution by the Mongol khans in the second half of the 13th century,

continued to exist in Khorezm, a country relatively independent over the course of a long ancient and medieval history, both from external and internal enemies. Its history can be traced by its archaeological artifacts.

Materials with Christian symbols were discovered in the ancient settlement of Devkesken-kala, located 60 km north-west of Kunya-Urgench on the Ustyurt plateau. Among the local population the topographic name is interpreted as "built by a demon, the *kala* (the fortress)" (Khojaniyazov and Khakimniyazov 1997, p. 3).

The Dutch orientalist Goeje identified the ruins of Devkesken with the medieval village of Gith and the later medieval Wazir. This assumption was also shared by S. P. Tolstov (1948, p. 53). These authors attribute the gravestones' fired bricks found there to the second half of the 15th century (Fig. 6) (Khozhaniyazov and Khakimniyazov 1997, p. 28, Fig. 6, B and G). Similar crosses were mentioned by V. N. Yagodin regarding Ustyurt, in its eastern quarter known as Chalburun-1 which has a triangular layout; those symbols were dated to the 13th–14th centuries (Yagodin 1991). Although there is a common assumption that after the Mongol conquest, Christianity began to gradually disappear from Central

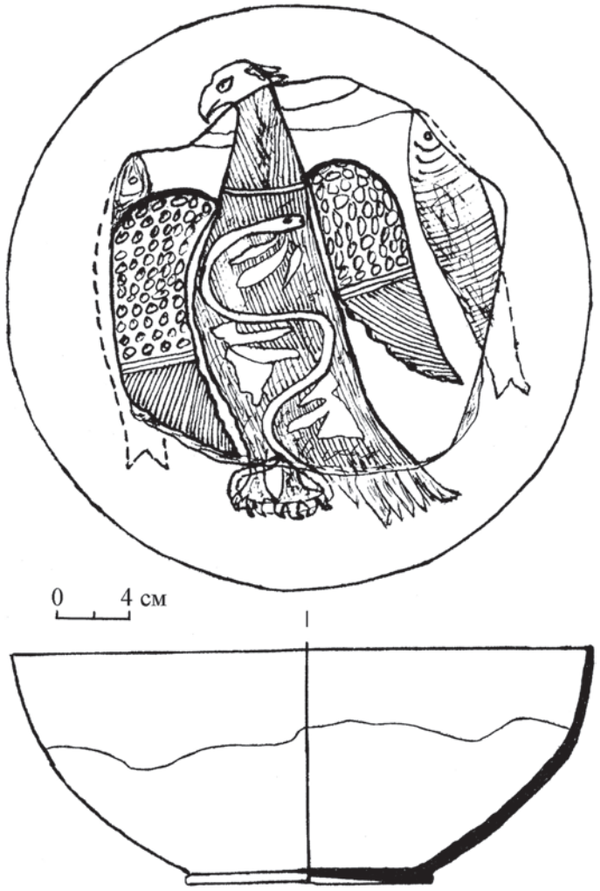


Fig. 5. Bowl of the 9th–10th centuries. Kuyukkala ancient settlement (Mambetullayev 1999).

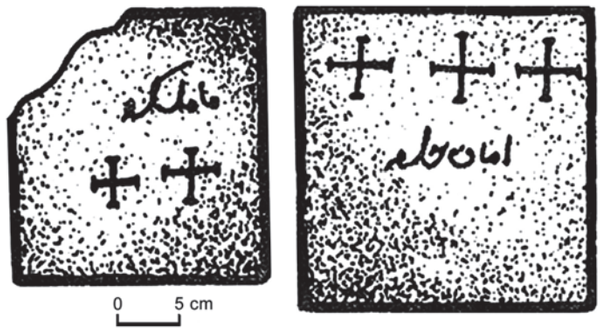


Fig. 6. Medieval bricks from the ancient settlement of Devkesken-Wazir

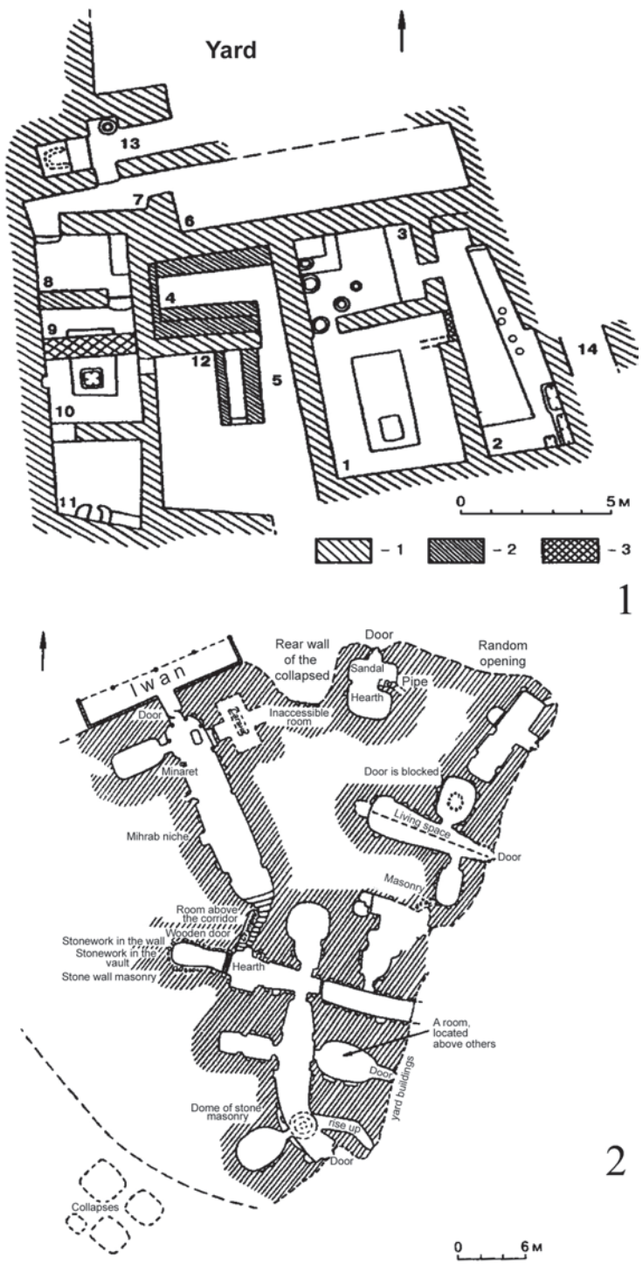


Fig. 7. 1. Temple of Koshtepa. 2. Caves on the ancient settlement of Afrasiab

Asia, such artifacts may indicate that adherents of this religion continued practice the "heresy" of the Nestorian Christian church.

Sogdia is located in the central part of Transoxiana and is one of the oldest and most developed areas of the settled culture of Central Asia (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bolshakov 1973, p. 12). The name "Sogdia" usually conveys the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya valleys. At the same time, sources differentiate three main areas: Central or Samarkand-Sogdia, Western or Bukhara-Sogdia, and South Sogdia or Nakhshab. Sometimes Northern Sogdia is suggested, implying the territory between Nurata and the Syr Darya, where settled life was comparatively poorly developed, but was known for its caravan routes with many caravanserais, and two main crossroads within the Syr Darya region. One crossroad was near the medieval city of Uturlitepa. This road led towards the capital of Chach [Tashkent], known also as Binket; the second crossroad led to Isfijab (known also as Sayram) and also to Banakat [Shahrukhiya] (Buryakov and Gritsina 2006, pp. 64–65).

The sources dating back to the 8th century, that is, to the time of the conquest of many small principalities by the Arabs, note only eight cities and villages of Central Sogdia. This is not very many in comparison with Chach and Ferghana, where there were much more cities (as mentioned above). The situation changed somewhat later. By the 10th century, there were mentioned twelve cities. Usually this is explained by the fact that Samarkand-Sogdia was mainly an agricultural region, which was to serve as the center capital; the presence of such a large trade and craft city as Samarkand, suppressed the development of other urban centers, so that most of the surrounded settlements are best described as large villages (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bolshakov 1973, pp. 187–188).

As for the Bukhara oasis, by the 10th century there were almost three dozen cities which testifies to a fairly high density of urban life. At the same time, some cities, such as Tavavis, Baikent, Bamijket, Ramitan, were growing and played a significant role in the economic and political life of the region.

Southern-Sogdia is one of the oldest urbanized regions of the Central Asian interfluve, although there were fewer cities here than in Samarkand-Sogdia. Since ancient times, it was divided into two economically and politically independent historical and cultural areas: the eastern foothills, which in antiquity was called Nautaca and Kesh in the Middle Ages, and the western plain-steppes, known as Xenippa since antiquity and Nakhsheb in the Middle Ages (the Arabs called it Nesef).

Medieval sources, mainly of the 10th century, quite clearly share the above conceptualization, so that "Sogdia" meant Samarkand and its capital city. For example, Ibn Khaukal in his famous work "Book of ways and countries" wrote: "From the eastern side, Sogdia is directly adjacent to Bukhara, which begins when you pass Karminia and Dabusiya." Although the same source immediately stipulated that there was an opinion that Bukhara, Kesh (Kish), and Nesef (Nasaf) constituted the districts of Sogdia, it was also acknowledged that these were under the control of a separate *divan* [government] (Betger, 1957. p. 14). Naturally, Sogdia, through which all roads converged, contributed to the spread in Central Asia of Christianity as well as its associated religion Manichaeism, and could not keep unexposed to these world movements.

Koshtepa settlement. A unique early medieval monument in Central-Sogdia was Koshtepa, which was located on the left bank of the old Dargom River channel near the villages of Akmachit and Utamas in the Urgut region of the Samarkand area (Iskhakov, Tashkhojayev, and Khojayov 1977, pp. 88–97). During an early excavation of the site, there was revealed a monumental building made of *pakhsa* [cob, rammed earth] with an unusual plan. The authors of the excavation dated it to the 6th–8th centuries. The building consisted of two parallel rooms and a round hall with a diameter of 8 m (Fig. 8). The only entrance was located in the northeastern corner of the building. In room 1 there was a U-shaped sufa. In the eastern part of the sufa there was a small hearth of an obviously non-domestic purpose.

A pit with an oval bottom of 60 cm in diameter was cleared in the northwestern corner of the room. The shape of the pit indicates that there was a *khum* inside. These attributes, as well as the absence of household utensils on the floor, by analogy with similar rooms at Afrasiab, Kafirkala and Balalyktepa, allowed the authors to assume that this was a fire-worshiper's chapel (Ibid. p. 93–94).

In the room 2, the most remarkable discovery was a fragment of a khum's rim with three impressions of a seal. This consisted of two male figures; one man was shown in a standing position and he is dressed in a long-skirted ceremonial robe, with a magnificent headdress on his head. In one hand he holds a book, and in the other one, which is held high, there is a cross. The second man is kneeling and is also dressed in long skirted attire. In the opinion of the authors, this scene represented the baptismal rite.

According to the authors, the ground plan of the rooms having a round hall resembles some Byzantine Christian churches, and the absence of household utensils permits the interpretation of this structure as serving Christian religious ceremonies (Ibid. p. 94). Obviously, the presence two different religions in one building is peculiar. This circumstance should not be surprising, taking into account the fact that religious loyalty of the local population and local clergy [persisted when conversion] to other religious persuasions happened. This is seen in the monuments of early medieval Ustrushana and Sogdia, which preserve traces of several religions (Buryakov 1999, p. 12). The question regarding why two religious structures were in the same building is answered by the idea that this structure, as specially designed for certain religions, served a rural area (Iskhakov, Tashkhojayev, and Khojayov 1977, p. 94).

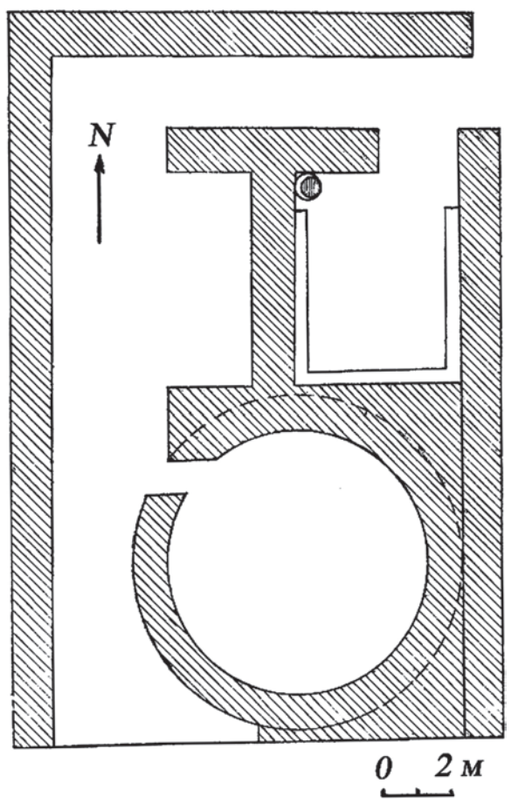


Fig. 8. An early medieval Christian sanctuary at Koshtepa

On the other hand, Yu. F. Buryakov suggests the possible coexistence here of two cults that used Christian symbolism – Christianity and Manichaeism (1999, p. 15). According to E. V. Rtveladze, a rectangular building with a round hall, opened at the settlement of Koshtepa-I in the Urgut region, dating back to the 7th–8th centuries, is interpreted as a Christian religious building

(Rtveladze 1999, p. 77). Crosses on ossuaries found there also identify the monument as a Christian church (Iskhakov, Tashkhojayev, and Khojayov 1977, pp. 93–94).

In 1929 M. E. Masson saw two tombstones in the Ashgabat Museum of Local History. He analyzed them and made an estampage from the front side and sent them for translation to Leningrad. A. V. Paikova read the following epitaphs on the *kairaks* (stones): "This is the grave of the boy Petion," as well as the name and spiritual title "Alka Periodevt." According to geologists this material is quartz-mica shale and is widespread in Western Uzbekistan (Minosyants 2013, p. 620). M. E. Masson assumed that the location of the *kairaks* should be related with the Christian village of Vazgerd in the mountain region south of Samarkand, comparable with Urgut (Masson 1978, p. 50–55).[2] There is an interesting report by M. E. Masson that he heard a story of an old Urgut man who saw at a local butcher four such stones serving as weights. On two of them there were embossed crosses and strange inscriptions (Ibid. p. 55).

In the pre-Mongol period Christians settled also in the suburb of Samarkand. In the area of Registan Square, there were discovered several burials, that according to the size of the bricks (21×21×3 cm; 30×16×4 cm), suggest they date to the end of the 10th – early 11th century. The burials were unusual. They consisted of rows of fired bricks; the length of the rows was 192–195 cm, width – 60–63 cm, height – 40–45 cm. Large fired bricks (42×20×9 cm) overlapped each other over the rows. The rows were oriented from the west-to-east direction. These were buried inside the two structures, squeezed into narrow cists. One of the burials contained metal plaques of a Nestorian type. In the remaining burials there was only dust (Buryakov and Buryakova 1973, p. 209–210). North of the burials there was an excavated room, and its floor was covered with majolica tiles in the shape of a Nestorian cross.

In the opinion of researchers, they uncovered remains of burial structures and a Christian church of the Nestorian creed (Ibid. p. 210). It is known that Torah-observing Christians lived in one quarter at Chakardiz, where a cemetery with cist burials was studied. So the excavations within Registan Square represents another archaeological confirmation of the written sources about presence of a Christian metropolitan bishop in Samarkand already in the early medieval period (Barthold 1964, p. 275).

Suleimantepa (Kichik, Sufion, Urus-Machit) – Vazgerd. The settlement is located on the southern outskirts of the village of Urgut in the Samarkand region, about 40 km from the city of Samarkand. During excavations in 1995–1997, it was suggested that there was a Christian church in the highlands of Savadar established by immigrants from modern-Iraq (Betger 1957). The most detailed information about the church is given by Ibn Hawqal (10th century): "There is a Christian church in Savdar where they gather. I found Christians

[2] The exact location of Vazgerd was determined to be the Suleimantepa ancient settlement near Urgut. See below for more details.

there... They arrived here because of the favourable geographical location and because of a healthy climate and privacy... This area dominates most of Sogdia and is called Vazgerd. In the mountains of Savador there are gorges, in each of which rivers flow to the plantations..." (Ibid. 1957, p. 141).

The church's location was researched by many scholars since the end of the 19th century. A series of investigations led to a particular place, based on a few artifacts of an explicit Christian character, especially the image of crosses and Syriac inscriptions on one of the cliffs, near the ruins of where the church was found later.

The monument was found with the help of local residents during a survey between 1995 and 1997. It is located 1134 m above sea level. In 1999, test excavations were performed and then continued in 2004–2006 (*Report of the East Sogdia*... 2004, p. 2–4; Gritsina, Savchenko, and Ivanov 2006; Savchenko and Dickens 2009, pp. 124–130, 300, pl. 11). Researchers unearthed a rectangular room made of fired bricks that is attributed to the Samanid and Karakhanid eras; the structure is a basilica with three areas (Fig. 9). The main entrance was at the western end of the building, shifted slightly to the north. The floor of the room was covered with ceramic tiles and fired bricks. All along the nave, there were platforms lined with fired bricks which were filled with tightly rammed loess. The purpose of the platforms remains unclear. From the north, a courtyard adjoined the basilica, that was later heavily damaged by agricultural work. In the southern wall there were revealed two passages which in the opinion of the excavators, led to an open courtyard, adjacent to the church building from the south (*Report on the work of the East Sogdian*... 2006).

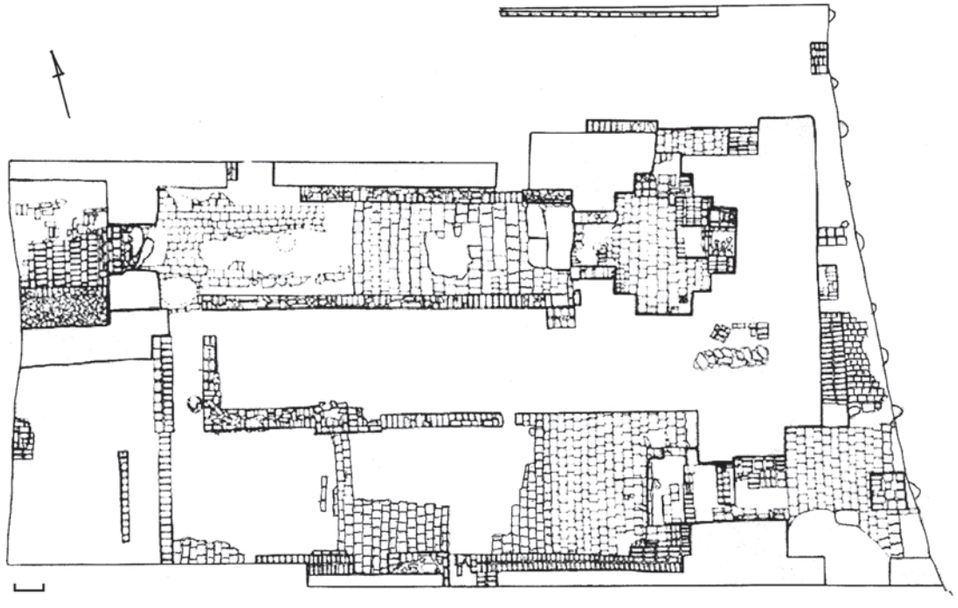


Fig. 9. Christian monastery of Suleimantepa in Urgut. Plan of excavation 2005. Drafted by: G. P. Ivanova

Among the finds with Christian symbols, there was a metal cross (that had a broken upper part), as well as several fragments of ceramic items etched with crosses (Gritsina, Savchenko, and Ivanov 2006, p. 7).

Among the artifacts associated with Christianity were coins bearing the image of the cross, although not all the researchers consider them to be Christian symbols. It was theorized that the earliest coins were from the Bukhara oasis, that is, Western Sogdia and dated back to the 4th–6th centuries. A collection of copper coins with Nestorian symbols were found in the area of the Varakhsha ancient settlement. On some of them, the obverse depicts an animal and on the reverse side – the Nestorian cross

Fig. 10. Urgut. Metal pectoral cross

Fig. 11. Urgut. General view of the church

Fig. 12. Urgut. View towards the altar

Fig. 13. Urgut. Suleimantepa. Altar

(Fig. 17). The coins are divided into three groups. In the first, there is a lion, on the second, a deer, and on the third, either an elephant or some other animal (Musakayeva 1994. pp. 42–43, Tab. 1, 1–12; pp. 45–46). Obviously, the coins of Western Sogdia on the obverse side there was symbolism referencing Jesus Christ in the form of an animal that was considered sacred, and on the reverse side – a cross. A coin with the inclusion of two crosses located flanking a king's bust was found in the Afrasiab ancient settlement within one layer where the coins of the Sogdian king Shishpir (late 7th century) was found. Researchers consider this as a consequence Byzantine coin iconography and its influence on the area (Ibid. p. 47; Rtveladze and Tashkhojayev 1973, pp. 232–234; Smirnova 1981, p. 25). In the eastern part of Sogdia there is also a series of coins depicting a figure in an unusual double-hoop-shaped ear-covering headdress. A tamga and the Nestorian cross are depicted on the reverse side (Smirnova 1981, p. 353).

As noted above, A. I. Terenozhkin found a bronze pectoral Nestorian cross in the ancient settlement of Afrasiab (Terenozhkin 1950, Fig. 72.2). Then in 1999 an ossuary-necropolis was discovered near the ancient fortress wall, destroyed by the Arabs in the second half of the 8th century. In one of the *badrabs* [rubbish pits] dating to the Muslim period, there were discovered 44 archaeologically intact ossuaries as well as fragments from other ossuaries (Ivanitsky and Speneva 1999, pp. 83–84). Some of them depict Nestorian crosses (Buryakov and Gritsina 2006, p. 72). Similar crosses with flared ends were found on other Central Asian ossuaries, architectural

Fig. 14. Crosses on stones near Urgut

Fig. 15. Censer from Urgut

Fig. 16. Urgut. Suleimantepa. Cross on pottery

Fig. 17. Coin from Bukhara Sogdia. Enlarged

disks, Sogdian fabrics and coins (Ivanitsky 1994, p. 67, Tab. 4, 3, 9; Tab. 5.2; Musakayeva 1994. p. 43. Tab. 19). Analogous crosses are seen on kairak or brick graves of the Eastern (Syriac) Christians in how they marked their graves (Goryacheva and Peregudova 1994, p. 93, Fig. 23.9). The crosses on the Samarkand ossuaries were depicted under arches. Images under arches are generally characteristic of Central Asian ossuaries and may have been inspired by Roman architecture (Ivanitsky 1994, p. 67. Tab. 4, *1-2*).

Another curious location is the Koshtepa semi-underground complex, discovered at the end of the last century in Southern Sogdia. According to several artifacts, the monument was interpreted as a Christian church-monastery (Raimkulov 2004, p. 123–129, fig. 1–2). This is one of the earliest Christian monuments within the territory of the Central Asian interfluve, which dates back to no later than early 7th century (Raimkulov 2000, p. 233).

The Koshtepa complex is located in the Kashkadarya region of Uzbekistan in the village of Shaikhali near the city of Karshi. Nearby there are ruins of a medieval capital city belonging to the Nakhshaba (Nasafa) region, now known as the ruins of Shullyuktepa. The discovery of a Christian complex near the metropolitan center was not coincidental. For a number of reasons, Christians preferred to build their main buildings not within cities, but next to them. This tradition began already in the early Middle Ages and continued until the Mongol period. This is evidenced by the churches and ecclesiastical complexes discovered in Kyrgyzstan (Kyzlassov 1953, pp. 220–223 et al.), and the Christian monastery of Suleiman-tepa (medieval Vazkerd), located far outside the walls of Samarkand, in a mountainous area [as mentioned above] (Betger, 1957; Gritsin, Savchenko, and Ivanov 2006).

The architectural complex of Koshtepa is situated within the settlement with the same name, which is a hill ridge that stretches out in a north-south direction, measuring 25 by 100 m and has a height of up to 13 m with its citadel in the southern part (Raimkulov 1997, pp. 110–111).

Excavations uncovered thirteen successive premises. The main entrance to the complex was room 13, which was a cross-shaped corridor. The corridor was distinguished by a niche where there was a *khum*. On the western end of the corridor there was a *sufa* [bench]. A semicircular single-chamber hearth was built behind the sufa. There is an interesting detail: four rooms located south of room 7 were filled with loose, homogeneous sandy soil. Subsequently, this feature at Koshtepa will serve as as one of the main arguments for identifying other monuments as Christian (Raimkulov 2004. p. 126).

Rooms 1, 2, and 3 which did not have an external entrance were also interesting. In Room 3 there were uncovered five, and in the Room 2 four, ceramic hollow cylindrical structures of various sizes. All of them were handmade from unfired clay. On the floor in the Room 2, there were discovered the remains of two more cylinders that were 66–69 cm long. Also there were found unfired stock cylinders. According to the researcher at Koshtepa, these cylinders were intended for the burial of deceased Christians, although no human bones were found inside them (Raimkulov 2001, pp. 147–148).

In principle, the dimensions of the cylinders (their diameters range from 32 to 55 cm) allow placing human bones in them, which must first be gnawed by dogs and dried in the sun following local Mazdakite traditions. One scholar considers, by analogy, the discovery of cylinders with human bones in the city cemetery of old Merv, of which their sizes were similar to those from Koshtepa; the items are dated to the second half of the 7th century (Obelchenko 1969, pp. 86–98). Not far from the cylinders were a large cauldron decorated with plaques and an ornament in the form of trees and centipede (Raimkulov 2004, p. 125).

According to the author of the excavation of the Koshtepa complex, the so-called chemical laboratory excavated in Paikend could have been maintained by Christian doctors. It seems that this is indicated by the fact that it was backfilled, and its passageways were immured with bricks (Mukhamejanov and Semyonov 1986, pp. 211–219). Before the complex was abandoned, some rooms were walled up with mud brick.

S. K. Kabanov, researcher of the Koshtepa complex, mentioned two premises in the ancient settlement of Kajartepa that can be considered an analogy, which also had arched ceilings and sandy filling. It seems that they were cut down in a dense loess (Kabanov 1977. pp. 14–15). Kajartepa is located within two farsakhs (16 km) from Nessef and is associated with the Kajer medieval settlement, mentioned in written sources of the 9th–12th centuries. If there was really a similar complex in Kajartepa, then the two Christian structures were located at a relatively short distance from each other. Perhaps they succeeded each other, since the premises on Kajartepa date back to a later period, after the desolation of Koshtepa (Ibid. p. 18).

The excavations at Koshtepa revealed two tower-shaped censers and other religious objects (Raimkulov 1997, p. 114, Fig. 3), including a spindle whorl with an image of the biblical "well" or "spring of life". In one of the censers there is a carved equal-sided Nestorian cross. Likewise, in 1986, the excavations at a medieval manor near the Durmontepa ancient settlement unearthed a number of burials related to Christianity.

Ancient settlement of Durmontepa. It is located on the left bank of Zarafshan in the Pastdargom district, about 14 km northwest of Samarkand. It covers an area of about 30 hectares and consists of a citadel and two shahristans with an adjacent territory (rabad).

Between 1975 and 1979, Durmontepa was studied by the Samarkand regional group of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. The excavations of 1976 resulted in a discovery of material that dates back to the 3rd century BC and includes material from that time to the 12th century AD (Rostovtsev and Ivanitsky 1976, p. 540). According to researchers, the fortification of Durmantepa can be identified with the medieval cities of Kasralkam dating back to the 8th–10th centuries and Isbisket of the 11th–12th centuries (Ibid. 1976, p. 540).

The monument was mentioned by G. A. Pugachenkova during itinerary research in 1981. In 1986, Durmontepa was studied by the Central Asian archaeological expedition of the Museum of Oriental Art (Moscow) led by G. V. Shishkina, who conducted a fairly wide excavation here and gave a detailed description of the topography of the site (Shishkina, Naimark, and Mkrtychev 1986).

In the eastern suburbs and on the western facade of the city walls, there were discovered two groups of burials. The eastern necropolis existed for a rather long time. There were three burials, but only the religion of one of them could be determined. This burial consisted of a grave pit within a wooden coffin (Fig. 18). A semi-fired brick was laid under the head facing the west, and according to the size (25×8×4 cm), it was clearly intended for the funeral rite. Among many objects accompanying the deceased, in the area of the abdomen, there was a sewn-on a garment an equal-arm Nestorian cross made of a thin gold sheet. In the opinion of G. V. Shishkina, a cross made of precious metal could indicate the priestly office of the buried. Two other graves were robbed in antiquity shortly after the burial (Shishkina 1994, p. 57). It should be noted that according to the information of Samania Yakut (12th–13th centuries), the village of Isbiskat is located two farsakhs from Samarkand (Lurie 2013, p. 229).

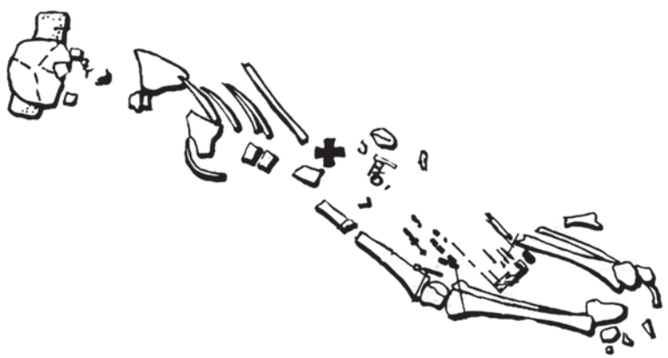


Fig. 18. Christian burial from the site of Durmontepa

As noted above, the Manichean center in Samarkand could have been located in Isbask – that is, Isbiskat (Ibid. p. 229). There were possible Christian artifacts and the so-called cave structures, known in various parts of Central Asia, which are also associated with

Christianity (Atakhanov and Khmelnitsky 1973, p. 187–201). One of the cave complexes is located in the Tashkent region and is known by the name of Korkhon. Decades ago it was examined by M. E. Masson (1953, pp. 100–103). The caves were cut in a natural hill, on top of which there was an ancient settlement. In 1990, employees of the Almalyk Local Historical Museum conducted excavations at Korkhon. Using excavation materials, as well as taking into account the cruciform layout of the complex, it was suggested that the Christian church was located here (Raimkulov 1999. pp. 92–93; ibid, 2000. p. 236–237).

A large cave complex was investigated on the western edge of the Afrasiab ancient settlement (Fig. 7.2). The complex consists of more than a dozen different rooms. The size of the rooms is amazing, reaching a length of 14–17 m with a width of 2–2.5 m, especially since they are cut in the loess. Moreover, the total length of the premises is several hundred meters. Most of the rooms are covered with loose delivered soil, which resembles Koshtepa, where individual rooms were backfilled with loose sandy soil. The complex is also associated with Nestorian Christians (Raimkulov 1999, p. 92–93; 2000, p. 238).

Chach and Ilak. These areas (rendered in Arabic transcription as "Shash") constituted the most urbanized part of Transoxiana. According to sources, there were about 50 cities, many of which reached considerable size (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bolshakov 1973, p. 195–201; Buryakov 1982, p. 145; Buryakov and Gritsina 2006, p. 165). The main irrigation source for Chach was the Chirchik river (in the historical sources – Parak, Farak, Tyurk), for Ilak, it was the Akhangaran (river of Ilaka) (Buryakov 1975, pp. 12, 105). The economy was supported by agriculture and livestock farming and also by the production of minerals, including gold and silver, various ore and non-metallic minerals. Most of this wealth was in the mountains, directly adjacent to the borders of Ferghana (Buryakov 1974; Buryakov 1975, p. 10). Usually the sources do not distinguish between Chach and Ilak, but emphasize them as one domain. According to Ibn Hawqal, in terms of width this domain was equal to two daytime crossings, and in length – to three: "In Khorasan and Transoxiana there is no country similar to it in the number of cathedral mosques, developed villages... On the one hand the border of the region extends to the Shash river... on the other – to the Iron Gates in the steppe, between Shash and Ispijab, which is called Kalas and is pastureland. On the third side, the borders of the region reach the mountains... On the fourth side, the border of the region approaches the Christian village of Vinkerd" (Betger 1957, p. 22).

There were two main roads whereby one could get from China to Chach. One of them, the northern one, was longer, but it was more convenient and safer. Bypassing the great Chinese deserts and mountains, this road led through the cities of Semirechye and Ispidjab, then on to Shash. According to al-Muqaddasi "from Ispijab to Gazgerd, there are two postal stations, then to Binket there is one crossover." In the text, he also clarified that "from Binket to the rabad of Anfaran, there is a daytime crossing, then to Gazgerd – the daytime crossing,

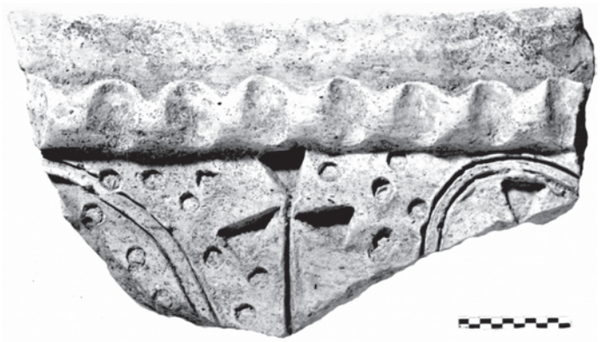


Fig. 19. Ossuary with the image of crosses

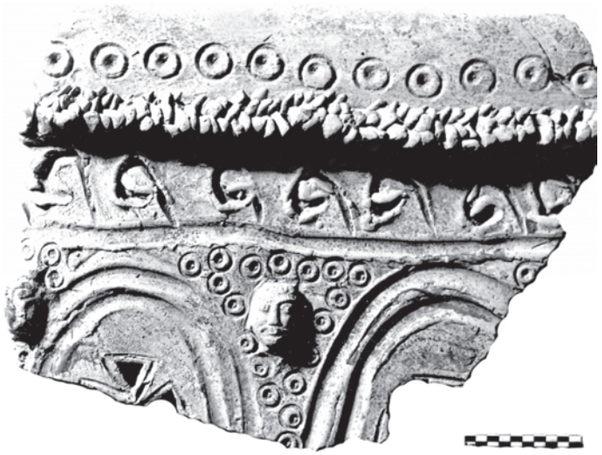


Fig. 20. Afrasiab. Ossuary with the image of Nestorian Cross

then to Ispidjab the daytime crossing" (Muqaddasi 1994, p. 244; Baitanayev 2003, p. 75).

Another road, the southern or Ferghana route, led to Shash from Khujand (Volin 1959, p. 206). According to Yu. F. Buryakova, it ran along the right bank of the Shash river to the point which was called Zhoi Muarsid, where caravans rested and waited for the best time to continue moving. From this point the caravans turned towards Chach, walked past the Mukhinnan castle to the "Chach silver mine" and then through a number of intermediate points arrived at Binket (Belenitsky, Bentovich, Bolshakov 1973. p. 202. Fig. 84). The most detailed information about Christianity in Chach is provided in the article by G. I. Bogomolov, in which he analyzed the known artifacts. In particular, he considered it strange that the sources were silence about the existence of Christian communities here; however, the geographical location itself, for example, precluded trespassing into the Talas valley and forbidding entrance into Chach (Bogomolov 1994, p. 71).

The activity of Christians in Chach is supported by a number of artifacts in various parts of the Tashkent region. As noted above, other finds with christian creeds were found on Kanka and in its district. The artifacts were mostly random in nature.

The earliest is a treasure trove of Nestorian (?) objects from Tashkent included silver beads, gold and silver coins, and a figurine of Christ on a donkey (Anboyev 1959, pp. 39–40). I. A. Anboyev managed to acquire a vessel made of bronze in the form of a beaker, which depicts a woman posing in prayer. Interestingly, the surface of the vessel is decorated with vertical leaf- shaped crests, which can assist in the date of its production. Elegant vessels with similar leaf- shaped stamps date back to the 9th century and were found in the rabad of the ancient settlement of Kanka (Tikhonin 1986, p. 122). The absence of such

vessels in the household complexes of the settlement indicates that they could have been used for ritual purposes (Bogomolov 1994, pp. 72–73). It should be noted that a fragment of a vessel with a similar leaf-like ornament was found in Ustrushana on the Kultepa ancient settlement (medieval Sabat), which dates from the 8th century (Gritsina 1991).

It is known that starting from the 3rd to 5th centuries, Jesus Christ was symbolically depicted as a lamb, a shepherd with a lamb on his shoulders, or a fish. Depicting him in human appearance was legalized at the Quinisext Council in 692, and therefore the image of Christ crucified on the cross appeared only in the 8th–9th centuries.[3]

Scholars are well aware of a golden bracteate [i.e. an ornamental device of thinly beaten precious metal] and a gold medallion from the Tashkent region. At this time, there was an intensive importation of Byzantine coins into Central Asia. According to M. E. Masson both of these artifacts imitate the Byzantine gold *solidus* (1972 p. 35).

Additionally, there are two gravestone – *kairaks* – with Syriac inscriptions associated with Christian beliefs stored in the basement of the Museum of Uzbekistan History. These kairaks from Tashkent date have been attributed to the 13th or14th centuries (Musakayeva 1994, p. 54).

Recent studies, however, have shown that they may date to a later time (16th century) (Vladimir, 2011; Dickens, 2009. pp. 28–29, 33–34).[4]

Ancient settlement of Kanka. Most of the finds in Chach, in whatever way associated with Christianity, were found in the settlement of Kanka. Kharashke, or otherwise known as Kanka, is one of the largest and most ancient settlements of ancient Chach. Its ruins, known today as the Kanka ancient settlement, are located 8 km east of the Syr-Darya, about 70 km south-west of Tashkent, on the left bank of the old branch of the Akhangaran river. Its shahristan covered more than 150 hectares and, including the rabads, the city would have spread out over an area of at least 400 hectares.

Kanka's square citadel within the first shahristan stood on about seven hectares. The height of the citadel ramparts reached 45 m. The second shahristan phase – was somewhat larger – and was also surrounded by the wall, its area covered 45 hectares. The third shahristan phase – was the largest – and it included more than 150 hectares. The walls of all these shahristans were monumental. Its defensive ramparts, the remains of the gates and street highways, the bazaar squares and the caravanserais are perfectly extant. On three sides, the city was surrounded by the territory of the suburb – or the rabad. The walls of the first smaller fortress of the citadel were the most elevated and vertical. If it is demarcated from the rest of the structure, then it will resemble an ancient eastern fortress.

[3] Please refer to editor's note 1 (above).

[4] [Editor's note: In the article cited here, Dickens dated most of the kairaks from Tashkent to the 13th century; the latest one is dated to the early 14th century. These dates reflect the consensus of most experts who have studied these artifacts.]

Excavations have discovered that the city of Kharashket arose on the site of a small settlement in the middle of the 1st millennium BC with dug-out houses and terracotta dishware, which is characteristic of the earliest agriculture society in the Tashkent oasis, known to scientists as Burgulyuk. In the opinion of scientists, the city developed in the form of a strongly fortified fortress in the 4th century BC. The ancient builders were well acquainted with the principles of ancient eastern fortification: the excavations revealed a clear square plan of the structure; oriented with its corners at the cardinal points of the compass; it had double fortified walls with a stylobate; a low berm; and a two-storied inner-wall that served as bypassing corridors for the covert movement of defenders (Buryakov 2010, pp. 19–20).

Because this fortified city was constructed according to a single plan, it has been suggested that this was the site known as Antioch of Zayaksart. This was where, according to ancient tradition, the commander Demadamant campaigned against nomads at the end of the 4th or early 3rd century BC and, having crossed Yaksart-Syrdarya, built altars to Apollo (Buryakov 1982, p. 106; Buryakov and Bogomolov 2009, p. 69).

Chinese chronicles mention the successful establishment of the Fire Temple of fire near the citadel, where their ancestors were venerated. The temple was demolished by a devastating fire in the early 7th century when the city and the temple were destroyed by Turkic tribes. There were clay seals inside the temple – *bullae*, which sealed either gifts to the temple or goods stored inside. These seals depict portraits of pagan priests and include inscriptions (Bogomolov and Buryakov 1995, pp. 218–239). The inscriptions on some of the bullae mention the name of Aspasak Kavatenak. The word *aspasak* can be translated as either "bishop" or "deacon" – this is a Christian title that was also used by Manichaeans (Buryakov 1999, p. 16).

In 2010 members of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan led by the author conducted excavations at the site (*Report on the work* ...). The key discovery of the season was a building, which we believe, was associated with a Christian community in the southernmost part of the Kanka excavation site. We came to this conclusion because of the artifacts found therein [as well as the building]. The first thing to mention is the unusual building plan. It had a series of rooms surrounded by a semicircular wall at the southern end. It is reminiscent of the oval house belonging to the Christian community at Merv. Although, in terms of time, that building functioned earlier than the one in Kanka, nevertheless it is reasonable that this tradition could manifest at later periods. The architectural complex [at Kanka] included a room with a niche in the wall, where a Christian shrine could be situated. The purpose of the other rooms still is being evaluated and prepared for the full publication of the site.

The second discovery was a rather large number of artifacts with Christian symbols, concentrated in a sufficiently limited area both inside the building and in close proximity to it. In this collection there are images of crosses on several *dastarkhans*, which are the lids

of large vessel, and these are were formed by molds pressed on the vessel's handle. Crosses were also present on glazed vessels belonging to the first half of the 11th century and this included an inscription that is partially preserved. In addition, there were other artifacts, such as: a bronze hairpin (the upper part of which is shaped in the form of a cross) and handles over other ceramic lids with red paint forming crosses, etc.

Also in the third shahristan, excavations of a public building uncovered the image of the cross. This cross was straight, with a slightly elongated base, made of red paint on clay plaster. Another find associated with the third shahristan was a fragment of a bronze cross. According to the author of the site report, the cross could have served as part of some large object – a wooden cross or casket (Bogomolov 1994, p. 73, Tab. 6.*2–3*; p. 77).

A curious bead consisting of a dark stone was also found. On the flattened side this stone there is an incised image of a double equilateral cross. The form can be dated to the 4th–6th centuries (Ibid. p. 73, Tab. 6.*4*; p. 77). Similar crosses were found on the Kaunchin seal amulets that are dated to the same period (Gritsina and Alimov 1986, p. 38, figs. 1.6–8). The following list of metal artifacts recently found also represents significant evidence in favor of the existence of a Christian community at Kanka.

Bronze ring (Fig. 21). This is almost completely intact. On the ring there is a skull with two crossed bones located behind the head. The image is clear, and all the details are characteristic of such symbols. Of course, the image of the skull itself implicates the idea of death. The image of the skull as a symbol of death was quite widely known in Christianity and became a kind of emblem of the mortality of the world [i. e. memento mori] (Pyatnitsky 2013, p. 315). Oddly enough this pirate emblem, the so-called "Jolly Roger", as seen in this ring is directly related to Christianity.[5] First of all, it became quite popular in the church and military-church environment, including Orthodox iconography, where the human skull is called the "Adam's Head". Starting from the 9th century, it is placed under the cross

Fig. 21. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Bronze Ring in the form of a skull and crossbones ("Jolly Roger"). 10th–11th centuries

[5] [This term] comes from the French *Joli Rouge*, which means "Pretty Red" and referred to a red flag which communicated that French pirates would show no mercy to their opponents. [Editor's note: The symbol of the skull was commonly used in ancient Roman art as a symbol of mortality and this was adopted by Christianity (e.g. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy, Inv. No. 109982). The term for the Christian symbol that refers to a *memento mori* is best called "skull and crossbones" in English-language publications rather than "Jolly Roger", since the latter term is only used in a much later context (18th century) and in the context of privateering.]

and inside the mountain [Golgotha] (Ulyanov 2009. pp. 168–169). The earliest Christian-military sign of this kind belonged to the medieval noble knighthood "Order of Good Death" (12th century). This tradition continued in the following centuries in the form of various symbols. In the early 20th century, it is also recorded in the Orthodox Russian army (Ibid. p. 169–170). Currently, it is used as a graphic design to signify mortal danger for products that may threaten human life.

Fig. 22. Samarkand Sogdia. Silver pendant. End of the 10th–11th centuries

Bronze Silver Pendant (Fig. 22). It has a diameter of 3 cm. There are two parallel loops above, which allow the pendant to stay in one set position. It was formed based on the design of Ethiopian crosses – a cross within a circle. In this case, we see a cross within a cross, which common in Christian iconography. The inner cross is straight, equilateral, and pointed, with a round enlarged center (core). The enlargement of the crossing (core) of the cross is widespread in the Christian Orthodox tradition. The outer cross is formed by semi-circles, and formed from the inner cross. It should be noted that Ethiopians, five centuries before the common era, had rituals that included the use of a golden ball surmounted by a cross on a pole. The first Christian crosses that had survived to our time have this Ethiopian form (Fig. 23). Regarding the examples of such crosses illustrated here, one is wood, the other is of bronze, and both date back to the 5th century BC. These equal-arm crosses within a circle later became known as the *Evangelist Cross* (Ibid. pp. 127–128). Similar crosses are found in later periods (Lueger 1904).

Analogous pendant. Its diameter is 2.2 cm. There is an eyelet on top. Unlike the above pendant, the cross within the circle is not complete since the parties that shape the cross do not intersect (do not crisscross) and do not have a core. That is, it is an irregular cross.

Apparently, the pendant is the work of incompetent master and customer. Pendants in the form of a circle with various crosses in it are known in other regions of Central Asia, while the images of crosses do not repeat each other (Kamyshev 2012. Ill. 8–9).

Fig. 23. Ethiopian crosses

Bronze pendant with a cross on a jug (Fig. 24). Its dimensions are maximum 2.2 cm in width and 3.7 cm in height. The object is unique – at least, we have never seen such kind before. Of course, it contains some kind of encrypted meaning, which is not yet noticeably clear. The shape of the jug is similar to the form on the glazed vessel described above and can give a clue to its dating. There are no eyelets for hanging. Apparently, the crossing arms themselves could serve this function, though orthodox Christianity would have allowed such a solution; therefore, it must be classified as an irregular cross. It is possible that the pendant was designed by a Christian sect. A pendant in the form of a similar jug was found in the Burana tower in Kyrgyzstan (Kamyshev 2012. p. 98. Fig. 1).

Fig. 24. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Bronze pendant. End of the 10th–11th centuries

Teardrop-shaped bronze pendant (Fig. 25). This item is from the Tashkent region. In its center, there is a straight cross with a raised circle at the intersection. The arms are filled with a netting of skew lines. There are cruciform figures between the arms. The height of a pendant is 5.5 cm, width is 3.9 cm.

A bronze censer cover? (Fig. 26) This is from the Samarkand region. Within a circle, there are six cruciform holes. In the center of the circle there is a knob in the form of an elongated oval. At the edges, at approximately equal distance from each other, there are three tangs.

The diameter of the object is 5.5 cm, height is 6.6 cm.

Bronze pendant in the shape of a dove (Fig. 27). This is from the Samarkand region. The bird is depicted on a stand. The head, tail and wings are quite clearly delineated. At the top there is a hole for hanging. Its height is 2.4 cm and width is 2.1 cm. Early Christian art provides many options for interpreting the image of the dove. In the Gospel texts, the dove is a symbol of the purity and innocence, sacrifice, and humility of Christ. It was a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Pyatnitsky 2013. p. 319).

Fig. 25. Tashkent region. Bronze pendant. End of the 10th–11th centuries

Bronze pendant in the form of a fish figurine (Fig. 28). The head is separated from the body by ring. Above

Fig. 26. Samarkand region. Bronze cover from the censer of the 10th–11th centuries

and at the side there are two loops for hanging. The surface is decorated with circles and other patterns designed to indicate scales. The height is 4.3 cm, width is 1 cm. [By analogy] in 1975, a rare type of a spherical conical vessel in the form of a fish was found on Kanka. The potter of the largest and most prosperous city of Shash not only attached a fishtail to the vessel, but violated the other canon: he made it asymmetrical, and one side it was swollen, which made it similar to a fish preparing for spawning. The master did not forget about "scales", expressing it with stamped triangles, circles and "stamens" (Gritsina 2000, pp. 224–225). In general, fish, snakes, donkeys, and lambs appeared already in the symbolism of the first Christians. Even in the 4th century, there was not yet developed a certain type of depiction of Christ, and Jesus Christ himself was represented in the form of symbols of the lamb and fish (Tseren 1976, p. 30; pp. 180–181). Apparently, this tradition continued throughout the Middle Ages.

Rim of the khum 10th–11th centuries (Fig. 29.*1*) The vessel is molded on a potter's wheel. Its diameter is 34 cm. On the upper surface of the rim, there is a double oblique cross drawn before firing. Such crosses are incomplete. Incomplete crosses of the Nestorians were also found on other monuments and only symbolically resemble that tool of execution (Vysotsky 1989, pp. 25–26; Belyayeva 1994, pp. 79-80, Fig. 16).

Glazed vessel 10th–11th centuries (Fig. 29.*4*) with the image of a straight cross in a circle.

Glazed chirag 10th–11th centuries (Fig. 29.*5*). The fragmentary remains consist of the loop- shaped handle and part of the reservoir. The vessel is covered with white glaze on all sides. The sides are decorated with an ornament of brown and black colors in the form of a grid with rectangular areas. In each area, there are drawn direct and oblique crosses.

Glazed bowl of the first half of the 11th century (Fig. 29.*6*). On a black background in the center of the vessel there is a jug with legs and a handle connected to the rim, and a long spout on the opposite side. On the body there is a Nestorian cross with flared arms. Along the edge of the mirror there is an pseudo-Arabic inscription made in white paint. Under it, there are remains of a "real" inscription applied with a brown paint.

Fragment of the dastarkhan. [As mentioned above,] a pattern consisting of crosses is present on the *dastarkhans* [trays or platters upon which food and drink is served].

The diameter of the object is about one meter. On the inside, the dastarkhan is decorated with stamped round ornaments. The outer circle is indicated by dots. The inner circle with rays most likely depicts the sun, inside of which there is a Nestorian cross. It is possible that, in this case, the cross is a symbol of the sun.

Thus, judging by the above artifacts, the presence of the Christian community on Kanka-Kharashket is apparently not accidental. In this regard, it should be noted that, only 20 km south of Kanka, on the right bank of the Syr-Darya, according to written sources of the 10th century, there was a Christian village of Vinkerd, which was established within the ancient settlement of Kattakyztepa; therefore, it is possible that the Kanka community was associated with the Christians of Vinkerd.

It has already been noted above that there is an inscription on the glazed vessel from the site of Kanka which is partially preserved and which, so fa,r has not been read with full confidence. It is unlike the inscription on the glazed vessel from Khujand, where it was interpreted as "Isa and Maryam". The cross on our vessel was made in a purely Nestorian style, and on the vessel from Khujand, the cross is depicted artistically, and the crucifix of Christ is encoded. That is, the cross was incomplete (Belyayeva 1994, pp. 79–80, fig. 16).

Ustrushana is an ancient and medieval state located between Samarkand and Khujand. It is situated, on the one hand, next to the Syr-Darya river and, the other hand, the Gissar Range. The most complete information about Ustrushana was provided by Arab geographers and historians. Ahmad al-Katib calls Ustrushana "a long and important country that comprises, as they say, 400 fortresses and several large cities" (Negmatov

Fig. 27. Samarkand region. Pendant in a shape of dove. 10th–11th centuries

Fig. 28. 1. Samarkand region. Bronze pendant in the form of a fish. End of the 10th–11th centuries; 2. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Bronze hairpin. 10th–11th centuries

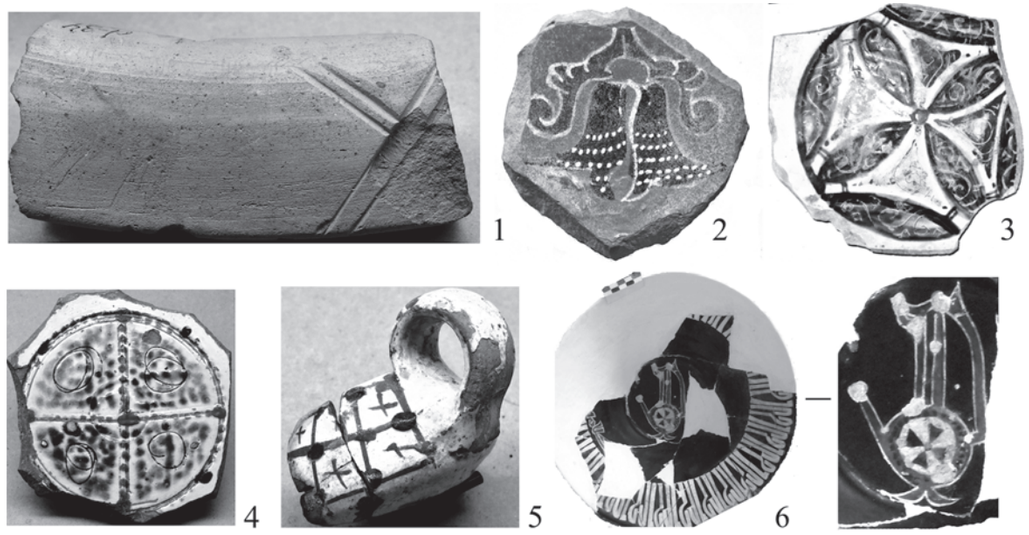


Fig. 29. 1. Rim of a khum 10th–11th centuries. 2. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Image of pigeons on the bowl. 10th–11th centuries. 3. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Bowl with the image of a Nestorian cross. 10th–11th centuries 4. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Vessel with the image of a cross. 5. Glazed chirag 10th–11th centuries. 6. Ancient settlement of Kanka. Image of jug with a Nestorian cross. End of the 10th–11th centuries

1953, p. 243). In the anonymous tract *Kitab Khudud al-'alam min al-Mashrik ila-l-Magrib* (*Book on the Limits of the World from East to West*) written at the end of the 10th century, Ustrushana was called "... a vast and prosperous region with cities and numerous *rustaks* (districts). A lot of wine comes from here, and iron comes from its mountains" (*Hudud-al-'Alam* 1970, p. 115). At the same time, this book lists the largest settlements of Ustrushana and mentions a fortified fortress at Zamin. According to al-Istakhri, most of the country was occupied by mountains: in it "... there is no river along which ships could sail, and there is no lake in it" (*Materials on the history of the Kyrgyz and Kyrgyzstan* 1973, pp. 18–19). He fully and accurately delineated the borders and names its cities. In the west, Ustrushana borders with Samarkand; in the north – with Shash and part of Ferghana; in the south, the area is adjacent to the borders of Kesh, Saganian, Shuman, Vashjird and Rasht; and in the east – with a part of Fergana, including "…the cities (of Ustrushana) – Arsianiket, Kurket, Gazak, Vagket, Sabat, Zamin, Dizak, Nujiket and Kharakana, and the city in which its rulers live is Bunjikat" (Ibid. p. 18). Al-Muqaddasi listed Marsmanda among its cities (Al-Muqaddasi 1994, p. 240). Ibn Hawqal noted that all the stated cities were centers of large *rustaks*, while in the rest of the *rustaks* there were no cities (Betger 1957, pp. 20–21).

As can be seen from the sources, the territory of Ustrushana was divided into *rustaks*. Their exact number has not yet been established. Al-Maqdisi cites its number as 17 although it is assumed that there were actually 18 of them, among which were the *rustaks* of Bunjikat,

Sabat, Zamin, Burnamad, Kharakana, Feknan, Khawas, Shavkat, Fagkat located in steppe, and the *rustaks* of Ming, Asbanikat, Biskar, Bangam, Vakr, Shagar, Mascha, Burgar and Buttam – in the mountainous part (Maqdisi 1994, p. 240). The capital of the region was the city of Bunjikat (which is the modern village of Shahristan in Tajikistan).

Ferghana, Chach and Ustrushana – neighboring regions – were linked by close economic and political relations for many centuries. These relations waxed and waned, sometimes fading in certain historical periods, then flashing with new vigor at other times. But they never severed completely. Already the first researchers of the Nurtepa culture noted the similarity of the ancient Ustrushana archaeological complex with the materials of Chust and especially Eilatan cultures. Material analysis reveals links with southern regions of Central and Achaemenid Iran, carried out through Marakanda, which was a kind of conductor of cultural innovations (Gritsina and Buraykov 2002, p. 174).

There is no doubt that the Nurtepa people experienced quite a tangible influence of both the ancient Sogdian and Kairakkum cultures. At the same time, the Nurtepa culture not only absorbed certain elements of the above-mentioned cultures but, in turn, was also their bearer, which is recorded on the native lands of Chach. From Ferghana and Khujand, the caravans entered Ustrushana lands. Bypassing a number of settlements located now on the territory of Tajikistan, they stayed in one of the largest urban centers of Ustrushana – that is, Sabat.

It should be noted that the peripheral countries of the Caliphate were very reluctant to accept religious innovations. This was reflected the rite of burial within ossuaries, which had not been adopted in Ustrushana, Ferghana, and Bactria. The relatively few examples that have been found are mainly imitations of Sogdian ossuaries. Glazed dishware took root with great difficulty in Samanid times. We observe the same thing with regard to Christianity. The small number of Christian-related artifacts, found in Ustrushana, especially in the Uzbek part of it, is another confirmation of this.

For example, a marble *cruciform plaque* was found on the site of Kultepa (medieval Sabat) among the materials of the Karakhanid period (Gritsina 1991, p. 197, Fig. 4.6). Its dimensions are: width – 4.5 cm, height – 4.0 cm, thickness of the base – 0.7 cm, total height – 1.5 cm. It has an unusual shape: in the center of the plaque there is a circle in relief rising above the base with a diameter of 2.2 cm. Its upper end was semicircular, as if repeating the upper contour of the circle. On the back there are twelve pairs of holes that are interconnected from the inside. In two of them, there are extant remains of copper wires, with the help of which it was attached to some object used in daily life.

Regarding the early medieval sources, Ustrushana at this time was under the rule of the Turks. There is a mention of a young nameless ruler (618–626), who along with Kan (Samarkand) sent an embassy to China (Bichurin 1950, p. 188; Negmatov 1957, p. 63). The palace of the Ustrushana kings was a complex with a secure system of fortification. In addition to the vast "throne" hall, there was a "small" hall, a palace temple, bedrooms

and living quarters, utility rooms, an arsenal in the form of connected rooms and passages, in which thousands of rounded stones and projectiles were stored. Under the floors along the *sufas* of the central corridor there was a warehouse that stored materials in large *khums*. Up to nine to 10 tons of granular or liquid products could be stored in them at the same time (Negmatov 1973, p. 97–99; Voronina and Negmatov 1974, pp. 52–58). Despite the fact that the palace was looted and then destroyed and burned, invaluable monuments of culture and art were found within. So, for example, within the soft clay floor, there was found a treasure trove of bronze coins, which revealed the names of the first Ustrushana kings. About two hundred fragments of carbonized carved wood, including several sculptures depicting people and animals, as well as a frieze and panels with images of people, birds, fantastic and mythological scenes, were extracted from the rubble of the palace complex.

It also included the surviving remains of monumental painting, which decorated almost all the ceremonial rooms and corridors of the palace. The most striking was the six-meter image, reproducing the emblem [i.e. the Capitoline Wolf] of the "eternal" city – Rome (Negmatov 1968, p. 22–32; ibid 1973, p. 99; Voronina and Negmatov 1974, p. 68; Negmatov and Sokolovsky 1975, pp. 443–453). It seemed that the Ustrushana kings were significantly influenced by Byzantine Christianity. Such a large depiction, clearly associated with Western influence, was conspicuous. As such, the depiction of a Christian equilateral cross on the coins of Ustrushana rulers (who were very freedom-loving and cavalier) and may have served to reconcile Western Christianity and the totemic beliefs of the Turks, who deeply respected their ancestress – the she- wolf (Nesterov 1990. pp. 98–99). Moreover, both symbols, the cross and the she-wolf, could be interpreted in two ways. We will return to the cross symbol later. As for the she-wolf, we will particularly dwell on this issue – for it takes us into the complexity of the early medieval world which offered equal opportunities, when the newly emerging states were strongly influenced by various world religious systems.

According to written sources, the Ustrushana kings were subordinate to the Turks. The Turks brought their worldview to the inner regions of Central Asia. Exactly at that time the mythological origins of the Turks became widely known. The sources contain several versions of the ancient Turkic genealogical legend. According to it, the ancestors of the Turks, of the clan named Ashina, lived near a large swamp, where they were soon exterminated by a neighboring tribe. Only one ten-year-old boy survived, whom the enemies mutilated and threw into the swamp. But the she-wolf found him and fostered him: "There he grew up communicating with a she-wolf who became pregnant from him."

Undoubtedly, the Ustrushana rulers also knew well about this story of the Turks' origin, both because they were dependent on the latter and due to intermarriage with them. We will never know exactly which of the Ustrushana kings and why they sanctioned the myth of the she-wolf in their throne room. Was it just a nod to fashion? An indication of their adoption of

the Christian faith by one of the kings? Was it merely a reflection of the images that existed at that time, inspired by various religious movements? Or was there some other reason? In any case, both Christians and Turks, and Zoroastrians, and Buddhists (the influence of all these religions is traced in painting) could perceive this image positively – each in their own interpretation. On the other hand, was this not a peculiar embodiment of the idea of reconciliation (after all, God is one!) of all the major world religions?

There are interesting coins of Afshin ["prince"] Satachari (Type III), known as the "teacher" or "mentor", who removed his image from the recto and placed an elephant instead. It is known that the elephant is the Indian emblem of wisdom, conveying the elephant-like god Ganesh, who was the patron deity of trade (Smirnova 1981, p. 32). It begs the question, why did Satachari III choose this particular symbol. Engaging in trade in the East has always been a God-pleasing deed. During the reign of the first *afshins*, trade experience an unprecedented upsurge, especially in the numerous branches of the Great Silk Road. It is not accidental, that the earliest pre-Arab caravanserai of Azlyartepa, functioned in the 7th – early 8th centuries AD, was established in Ustrushana, near Zamin (*Ancient Zaamin* 1994, pp. 22–25; Gritsina 1995, p. 21).

It is worth noting that the coins of Rakhanch (type III), on the verso includes the Christian equilateral cross, resembling the so-called St. George and Nestorian crosses (Fig. 30). Similar crosses are found on the coins of other Central Asian rulers. It is believed that this is the influence of Byzantine coinage (Rtveladze and Tashkhojayev 1973, p. 232; Smirnova 1981, p. 32; Ivanitsky 1994, pp. 64–66). On the other hand, the cross is an ancient, pre-Christian symbol of the fire-saviour and the sun, a sign of eternal life and blessing. There are many reasons why it is widely spread in throughout the symbolism of the East (Neikhardt 1956, pp. 5–14; Rapoport 1971, p. 50; Gritsina 1984, pp. 85–88). Representing the cross next to the tribal tamga or dynastic sign, the rulers seemed to introduce the solar deity, which was to emphasize the legitimacy of their power and greatness. It is difficult to say at the moment why, among all the Ustrushana rulers, that only Rakhanch III, the last of them, resorted to supporting such a symbol. However, it cannot be excluded that this was connected with the dynastic struggle for power, since starting from the 8th century the names of the above-mentioned kings no longer occur, and they are replaced by kings of another ruling family. On the other hand, maybe the image of the Christian cross on the coins of this king is the key to answering the question of which of the *afshins* accepted the image of the she-wolf in the throne room.

Fig. 30. Coin of Ustrushana king Rakhanch

Apparently, Ustrushana coins bear the symbolism of three world religions: Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. This does not mean that they were all Buddhists (Ivanitsky 1994, p. 65). However, it can be assumed that all these three religions were recognized in the state, and its kings were notable for religious tolerance.

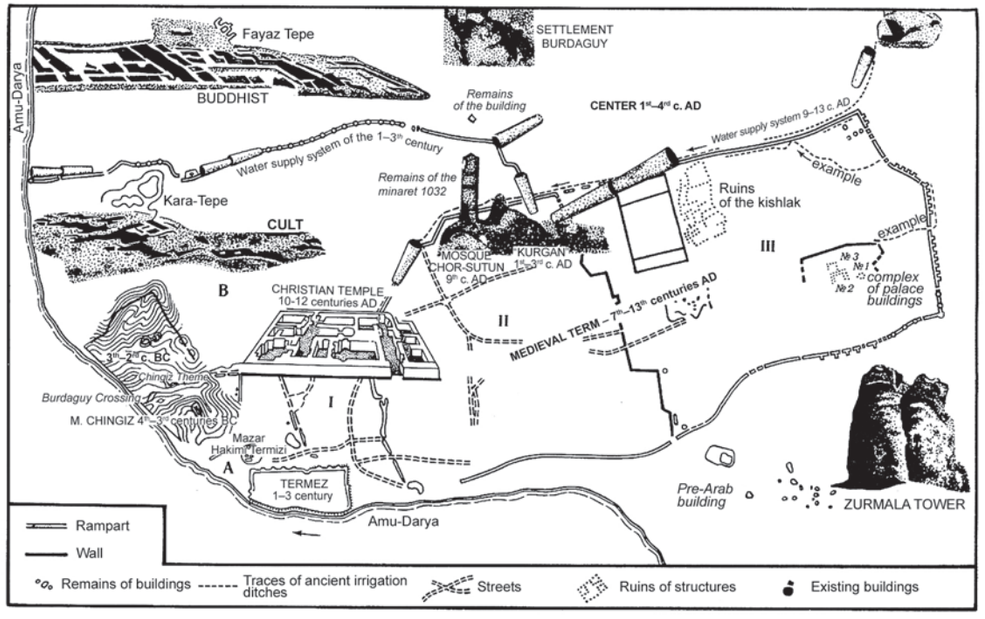
In 2016 fragments of gray-clay vessels with stamped decorations depicting crosses were found on the Eski Khawas site. One of them has an ornament in the form of a vertical row of crosses, bounded by lines (shard size is 3.7×4 cm, from excavation 4, layer IV). Out of the four crosses, two are in good condition. The diameter of the round stamp is 0.7 cm. The cross is a straight line with flared ends. It is possible to say that that the cross is enclosed in a circle, like the metal crosses from the Kanka site described above. It is dated to the 12th century.

An interesting artifact was discovered on the ancient settlement of Afrasiab. On the glazed vessel of the 10th-11th centuries there is a depiction of a pair of pigeons. The picture is placed in the center of the vessel on a dark brown background and is made with black paint. The wings are underlined with white specks. From above they are framed by an arch in the form of unreadable Arabic letters.

Bactria-Tokharistan is a vast historical region located on both shores of the Amu Darya, which included northern Afghanistan and the southern regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As noted above, already in the 3rd century, Christian preachers moved to Sogdian Bactria. One of the cities that attracted them to Bactria was Termez (Fig. 31, *1*).

Termez was the largest and oldest urban settlement in the upper reaches of the Amu Darya. It was formed an independent unit along with its surrounding region. In the 10th century, it consisted of a *kukhendiz*, a *medina* and a *rabad*, covering an area of just over 400 hectares. The city has always been under scrutiny of experts and is one of the most archaeologically studied sites in Central Asia. Many scholars believe that in ancient times it was called *Tarmita*; and in the Chinese version – *Tami*. Large-scale archaeological research, connected to preparations for its 2500th anniversary, showed that already in the middle of the 1st millennium BC there emerged an unfortified ancient settlement which stood near a large road connecting Northern Bactria with the Achaemenid metropolis. The rapid growth of the city was noted in the Greco-Bactrian period, when the early trade route started to develop from China through Northern India to Bactria and Sogdia, and later from Balkh. The Kushan era (the first centuries AD) includes the heyday of the city which was connected with the loss of significance of a road crossing near Kampyrtepa (Aleksandria of Oksiana). At this time, all the routes leading from Sogdia to Bactria were concentrated there. There are outstanding monuments of ancient, pre-Arab, and Muslim cultures preserved in the city (Masson 1940, p. 6–10; *Termez* ..., 2001; Pidayev 1987, pp. 87–96; ibid. 2001, p. 12–19).

Ruins of a Christian church were studied in 1979–1980 at Termez. This church was like the churches at Ak-beshim and Vashgird, which were located outside their respective



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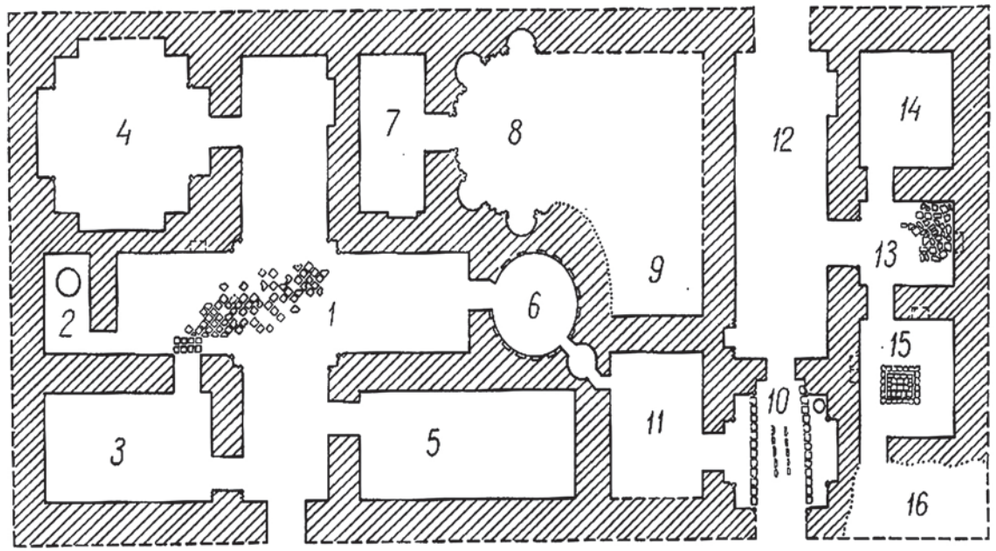

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Fig. 31. 1. Plan of Old Termez. 2. Layout of the Christian church

city walls (Fig. 31.*2*). After excavations, it turned out that it was a rectangular construction, consisting of sixteen rooms (Albaum 1994, pp. 34–36, Fig. 6). The walls of the temple were erected from *pakhsa* using square mud bricks. The thickness of the external walls was quite impressive – measuring 1.5 m. The ceilings were vaulted and domed, the floors were of clay adobe, but in some places with fired bricks. It should be noted that the floor in Vashgerd's church was also laid out with fired bricks (Gritsina, Savchenko, and Ivanov 2006, Fig. 8). In some rooms there were murals. The organizing center was the cruciform room 1. The main entrance to the building was located on the south-western side and led through a transverse hall – which can be classified as the nave (Fig. 12). It was crossed by a transept more than 20 m long. Two wells were uncovered during the excavation.

It should be noted that the well was excavated in the Basilica of Suleimantepa. According to the author who published the excavation, the designated area "Room 3" was the refectory of the Termez church. From the central nave, having made a meal, one could move into the transept. "Room 4" is interesting because it had rectangular niches and *sufas* along the walls. The *sufas* were covered with gypsum plaster. As a result of repeated repairs, the room became cruciform and was capped by a dome. According to L. I. Albaum, "Room 4" was either a chapel or baptistery (Ibid. pp. 36–37). "Room 5" looked different from the others – it was accessed through the entrance to the right of the external entrance. The same entrance led into the transept. The room is distinguished from others by drawings on the walls of religious content. One of them depicted a cross with flared arms, each of which contained an ornamental circle. The cross itself resembles Byzantine or Nestorian crosses. It is possible that the room served as a chapel but without an altar (Ibid. p. 37).

"Room 8" stands out both in regard to the form of the interior and in its decoration. In the southwestern part of it, there was excavated a large exedra with a diameter of 5 m. On both sides of the passage to the "Room 7", there were small niches with semi-domes. The large exedra was fully decorated with compound piers supporting ribbed vaulting, of which 34 survived. "Room 10" had a cross-shaped layout. Based on analogies, Christian architects tried to use the layout in the form of a cross whenever possible. So, in one of the rooms near the apse of the Vashgird church, there a cruciform arrangment. In addition, the complexes which have isolated rooms associated with worship, are also known in other places, for example, in the monastery complexes of Armenia Mamaravak and Khoranashat. Most likely, the church was built in the 7th–8th centuries, and its destruction can be attributed to the end of the 13th century, when the Mongol khan Gazankhan converted to Islam (Ibid. pp. 39–40).

An interesting discovery took place near the ancient settlement of Jandavlyattepa in the Sherabad region. During the survey of the destroyed Kichiktepa, there was found a spherical conical vessel with a broken neck, decorated with a stamped ornament with a Christian symbol (Abdullayev, Stancho and Bokhach 2003, pp. 18–19). In its lower part, there was a horizontal row of equilateral Nestorian crosses, and in the middle part – fishes

were depicted in an upright position. Fishes were one of the earliest Christian symbols. As it will be seen below, a similar device on a *simabkuzach* [a spherical or conical vessel] was also found at other monuments of Transoxiana.

Bracteate of Anastasius. Among other finds in Northern Bactria, the *Anastasius* is of special interest (Fig. 32). It was found during construction in the Shurchin district of the Surxondaryo Region in 2012. On the obverse of the bracteate there is a portrait of the emperor. A spear is shown behind his head at the right side. This detail, as well as the fact that the emperor is depicted in a military coat, allows us supposing that he was a military leader. On the reverse side the same emperor is depicted, but not in a convex relief but rather in a concave depression, forming a reversed image from the front (Musakayeva 2013, p. 610).

Earlier, in 1889, in Surxondaryo when digging a *badrab*, a bracteate was found among various artifacts that included ceramics, gems and coins. According to M. E. Masson, these gold coins were bestowed to Peroz by the Byzantine government for combating the Hephthalites in the early 6th century. In the opinion of M. E. Masson, that certain local Christians, perhaps, played a role in the distribution of Byzantine coins (Masson 1951, p. 96). Based on historical conclusions of M. E. Masson, it is possible that among the money were the coins of the emperor Anastasius (491–518) and that could have served as prototypes for the manufacture of the bracteate from the Surxondaryo Region (Musakayeva 2013, p. 611).

Ferghana Valley. From ancient times the Ferghana region was densely populated. This notion is testified by the numerous monuments of various historical eras and by historical sources. The most trustworthy information about ancient Ferghana – also known as Dawani – was provided by Chinese chroniclers dating back to the 2nd to 1st centuries BC (Gorbunova 1986, pp. 58–68). In particular, they reported that in Dawani "there are more than 70 large and small cities, the population extends to several hundred thousand" (Bichurin 1950.II, p. 149). Of course, this evidence appeared long after these cities and Dawani had already passed through many years of development; its civilization arose much earlier, that is before it had established relations with China. As it was rightly

Fig. 32. Golden Bracteate of Anastasius

noted by Y. A. Zadneprovsky, the initial stage of development should be associated with the middle of the first millennium BC (approximately during 5th–4th centuries BC) and this would have coincided with the archaeological Shurabashat culture (Zadneprovsky 1997, p. 109).

The assertion that the routes of the Great Silk Road passed through Ferghana, where the most ancient city points emerged later, is supported by the numerous finds of Khan mirrors and Wushu coins. In antiquity, and especially during the Middle Ages, Ferghana remained an important gateway to China, although not the only one. This was testified by contemporary sources that expressed a large number of villages and cities. Geographers of the 10th century count about 40 cities here. According to Ibn Hawqal, "Ferghana is the name of a country that is a vast province containing rich cities and villages." In another place, he noted that "in Transoxiana there are no villages that are larger in size than Ferghana; sometimes because of the crowds of people, and also because of the abundance of livestock and pastures, it could take up to one day to pass through" (Betger 1957, pp. 24–25). In the *Khudud al-Alam* it is reported that "Ferghana is a flowering region, large, abundant in benefits. There are many mountains, steppes, cities, and running waters. It is the gateway to Turkestan. And there are many Turkic slaves. In the mountains there are many gold and silver mines, as well as deposits of copper, lead, ammonia, and mercury, a burning stone... and many medicinal herbs" (*Materials on the history of the Kyrgyz and Kyrgyzstan* 1973, p. 44).

Fig. 33. Ancient settlement of Kuva. Pectoral Cross

Not many archaeological sites associated with Christianity has survived in Ferghana. The most reliable archaeological evidence of Christianity in Ferghana is a solid silver pectoral cross – perhaps the most common type of Christian symbol that existed in the Middle Ages and modern world (Fig. 33).

The cross was found in the shahristan of the Kuva ancient settlement during excavations of a residential building of the 10th–11th centuries (Raimkulov and Ivanov 2000, pp. 160–161). Kuva (known in the Middle Ages as Kuba, currently, Quva) was the largest city of Ferghana and the residence of the heir of the throne in the early Middle Ages. According to archaeological excavations, by the beginning of the Arab invasion, the total thickness of its city walls reached at least 12–14 m. As noted above, at this time in Transoxiana, there was a surge in the activity of Christianity. It is not accidental, that the Arab geographers mention several shrines of this religion exactly at this moment in history.

Archaeological research has confirmed that by the 10th century the shahristan and the old citadel were poorly inhabited, and all the main buildings shifted to the more extensive rabad, where a new citadel was erected. Since the mid-10th century, the city's coin mint began to function there (Davidovich 1960; Kochnev 1999). Kuba reached its zenith during this period. Unfortunately, the rabad was completely destroyed by the modern city, and it can be judged only by random finds. After the Mongol invasion, the city fell into decay and never played a dominant role afterwards.

Fig. 34. Ancient settlement of Eski Khawas. Nestorian stamped cross on a gray clay shard. 12th century

Kuba was famous for serving as one of the main trade and craft centers of Ferghana Valley as travelers made their way to China. In antiquity, it was an oasis only second the city of Akhsikath. Eastern geographers report that Kuba stood near the river bearing the same name, which flowed into the Syr Darya; thus, it had a good water supply and was one of the flourishing cities, green with orchards and plentiful fruits. On the eastern outskirts of modern Kuva, along the Andijan-Margilan road, the ruins of a medieval city have survived in the form of a large rectangular fortress with a citadel covering an area of 12 hectares.

All this reveals Kuba as a major trade, craft, and religious center of the Ferghana valley during antiquity and flourished during the Middle Ages (Bulatova 1972, p. 93; Shirinov, Matboboyev, and Ivanov 1998; Gritsina 2011, pp. 87–88). It would have been attractive to evangelists and missionaries of various religions, including Christianity.

As for the silver cross itself, its length is about 4 cm (width – 2.3 cm). In the middle of the cross there was incised another cross in an oblique manner. Two crosses within one object is not so Christian practice up to the present (Ulyanov 2009, p. 265). The edges of the horizontal beam end with three petals – forming partial crosses (Raimkulov and Ivanov 2000, p. 160). In Orthodox Christianity today pectoral crosses with similar terminals are still used (Ibid. pp. 259, 264–265).

Another artifact, possibly associated with Christianity, comes from Andijan. It is a convex cover with a diameter of 17 cm, a height of 5 cm, and was made within a *kolyba* (a shepherd hut). Its entire outer surface is decorated with straight equilateral crosses within circles located symmetrically at the equal distance from each other. Christian symbols made within a *kolyba* and intended for serial production is a rather rare find. According to the accompanying artifacts, the object should be dated to the 11th–12th centuries (Abdulgaziyeva 1994, pp. 82–83).

Summary. This chapter provides a history of Transoxiana, known later as Maverannahr, which is now part of Uzbekistan. Christianity, as one of the established world religion, began to spread in this region during first half of the first millennium AD. The history of its expansion into this region is intricately connected with the history of the Christian church itself, as well as with the political and cultural history of the peoples of the Middle East and especially Iran.

Clearly Christian doctrine spread along the ancient caravan routes and this is why we find Christian artifacts widely distributed in Central Asia.

The traces of Christianity and partly Manichaeism can be found in all historical regions of present Uzbekistan. They are most clearly represented in Khorezm, Chach, and especially in Sogdia during the early Middle Ages. Traces of these religions, however, are less perceptible in in Ustrushana and Ferghana. There was a decline in Christianity during the 9th–10th centuries, when the Samanid state flourished, which was also a time when many churches were converted into mosques. Judging by archaeological data, a new surge in Christianity took place beginning in the 11th century until the Mongol invasion, and then gradually the faith began dying out during the following period. With that said, there should be also noted the obvious traces of Christianity that existed in a later periods (Vladimir 2011; Dickens 2009, pp. 28–29, 33–34).

Christian monuments of Albania (Azerbaijan) of the 4th–10th centuries

M. J. Khalilov (Azerbaijan)

Albanians were a tribe in the South Caucasus, who were first mentioned in the ancient written sources in connection with the Battle of Gaugamela between the armies of the Achaemenids and Alexander the Great in 331 BC. According to the generally accepted opinion of historical science, after this battle the Albanian tribes became independent from the decaying Achaemenid state, which led, in turn, at the end of the 4th – early 3rd centuries BC to the formation of the Albanian state; a large part of this territory falls within the borders of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan. However, there is an opinion that the account of Strabo about the first Albanian kings, in which each ruled their own tribe, can be related back to the times of the Achaemenids, since written sources only preserved information about the Albanian king who came into contact with Alexander the Great. Moreover, the Albans were not included in the ancient list of tribes dependent on the Achaemenids. The Albanian state existed continually, with some interruptions until the early 11th century.

The Albanians had their own writing system, which serves as evidence of their rich and distinctive high-level culture. The chief primary source regarding Christianity in Albania is the chronicle called *The History of the Albanians*, compiled in the early 8th century by the historian Movses Kaghankatvatsi and supplemented at the end of the 10th century by another chronicler, Movses Daskhurantsi.

The spread of Christianity among the Albanians and the declaration of Christianity as the state religion of Albania. The first preacher of Christianity in Albania was St. Thaddaeus – one of the twelve apostles. The following was reported about him in the *History of the Albanians*:

> ... when the time of the sun of righteousness came and our salvation had visited us, that indescribable being[which was] the light of glory and the manifestation of the Father's being, and having completed the incarnation, who also sat down in the glory of being and from whom it did not go away, and sent His disciples to preach across the world.

For us, the inhabitants of the East, the holy Apostle Thaddaeus was given to us as an inheritance... (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 6).

During a visit to Armenia, Saint Thaddaeus was killed at the order of King Sanatruk. After this sad event, the work of the apostle was continued by Saint Elisha who accompanied him. Here is what was written about him in *The Albanian History*:

His disciple, Saint Elisha, returned to Jerusalem and told the rest of his apostles about his [Thaddeus'] prolonged martyrdom. There, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Elisha was ordained by the hand of St. James – the brother of the Lord, who was the first patriarch of Jerusalem. Elisha, having received the East as his inheritance, directing his path from Jerusalem to Persia... avoiding Armenia, began to preach in Chola... From there he arrived in the region of Uti... then the holy Primate arrived in Gis, built a church... At this place emerged our first churches, the metropolis and enlightenment (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 6).

Chola and Uti, mentioned in this passage of this historical work, are the provinces of Albania. The settlement of Gis in the region of Uti corresponds to the modern village of Kish (the Sheki District of the Azerbaijan Republic), where an ancient church survived that was restored several times during the Middle Ages, and which, judging by the results of archaeological excavations, was established during the Late Antique period. This is one of the first Christian church built in the Caucasus. The exact date of the preaching work of St. Elisha in Albania was calculated based on the data of the *History of the Albanians*. The source stated: "In the year 43 of the Greek calendar, the Armenians became literate, 270 years after the enlightenment of the Albanians. 180 years after the conversion of the Armenians, in the days of Babken, the Catholicos of Armenia, there was formed a board on the ecumenical council of Chalcedon" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 47). The translator of the *History of the Albanians* into Russian, K. Patkanyan, wrote in his notes: "Probably, the author here refers to the Diocletian era or *Aera Martyrum* (Era of the Martyrs), from July 29, 284" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, p. 346). It is known that the mentioned Dvin Council was convened by Catholicos Babken in the year 506 (so that 506–180=326). In turn, the year 326, more precisely, the time after July 29 corresponded to the 43rd year of the Diocletian era of the "Greek calendar" (Kurdiani 2010, p. 463) (that is, 326–270=56). Thus, judging by the *History of the Albanians*, it turns out that the Albanians adopted the Christian religion as preached by St. Elisha in year 56 (Khalilov 2011, p. 29). It was the activity of St. Elisha in Albania that the Armenian Catholicos Abraham (early 7th century) had in mind when he wrote: "The Albanian throne that was before ours..." (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 47). Thus, according to this reckoning, Albanians were the first Christians in the Caucasus. The Albanian church had an apostolic beginning. In one of the manuscripts of the *History of the Albanians,* there is an account that the first Albanian Catholics until Grigoris received ordination from Jerusalem, and after that from the Albanian bishops i.e. after the Catholicos

Grigoris (who died in the year 337), the Albanian Church was autocephalous (independent) (Mamedova 2003, p. 9)

The *History of Albanians* emphasized that "blessed Elisha, having begun apostolic cultivation from the ends of the earth, enlightened only the northern region the East, not all of it" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 9). The Albanians who inhabited the southern area (on the right bank of the Kura River) may have only adopted Christianity at the end of the 3rd – early 4th century, during the time of the Albanian Catholicos Lazarus, who built the church of St. Pantaleon in the city of Lazarabad (Mkhitar Gosh 1960, p. 8) located between the cities of Barda and Beilagan. This church is chronologically the earliest of the Christian churches in Southern Albania mentioned within historical sources.

The *History of the Albanians* testifies that Christianity became a state religion in Armenia in 326 after the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine in 325. The *History of the Albanians* reported:

But at the time when the Lord visited the human race, He illuminated the whole west through the great emperor Constantine and enlightened Armenia through blessed Trdat, He proselyted the East... they [i. e. Albanians, according to M. Khalilov] were enlightened by Urnair. All these miracles happened at one time from God (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 9).

This, in turn, meant that in Albania, King Urnair declared Christianity the state religion, like King Trdat in Armenia in the year 326.

The Albanian Church and the Christian World. After the Fourth Ecumenical Council convened in 451 in Chalcedon, and with the condemnation of Monophysitism and Nestorianism, the Transcaucasian churches for almost 40 years did not reveal their position on those issues. It is possible that this was due to their desperate resistance to Zoroastrianism, forcibly spread by Sasanian Iran, as well as their fight against paganism.

In this period several major anti-Sasanian revolts broke out in Transcaucasia, including the coup of the Albania king, Vache II (Trever 1959, pp. 207–219; *History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 10). As a result, the Sasanian king Valarsh (Balash) in the year 484 was forced to declare the freedom of religion in Christian domains that were part of Sasanian Iran (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 17). When King Vachagan III the Pious came to power in Albania in 488, who "built as many churches in the East as there are days in a year" the process of eradicating paganism acquired a fierce character (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 22). By persecuting pagans Vachagan III was eight centuries ahead of the European Inquisition (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 18). Particularly ardent resistance to paganism in Albania was recorded in the province of Artsakh. The Albanian king "charged the strong country of Artsakh, which was under his authority, to leave the sacrificial veneration of evil idols" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 17). The 9th canon, adopted by the Aghuen (modern Agdam)

Church Council convened by Vachagan III no earlier than the mid-90s of the 5th century, provided for the death penalty for pagans (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 26).

At the end of the 5th – early 6th centuries in Byzantium there was a certain mitigation of an intolerant attitude towards the Monophysites. As early as 482, Zenon issued an "Enotikon" – a decree for the reconciliation of Diophysites and Monophysites (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 251, note 50). Unlike Zenon, the Emperor Anastasius even intended to annul the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon to convene a new one, which at the same time was supposed to approve Monophysitism, but he was poisoned and died (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 58). In such a situation, the churches of the South Caucasus had chosen Monophysitism as an official stance.

According to researchers, the local Council, which anathematized the decision of the Chalcedon Council, took place in 491. Representatives of the Armenian, Albanian and Georgian churches took part in it (Mamedova 1986, p. 234). In our opinion, in this situation where there was an absence of unity (i.e. union) among the Transcaucasian churches in the South Caucasus, there could have been convened three independent Councils. But already Emperor Justin I (518–527), who succeeded Anastasius I on the Byzantine throne, resumed the persecution of the Monophysites (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 58). It will be indicated below that at least in 521, the Albanian Church was already a Diophysite religious structure.

In 551 Abbas became the Catholicos of Albania. An analysis of the written sources indicates that during his reign (551–595) the Albanian Church was Diophysite. They wrote to him from the Dvin Church Council, which convened in 551, "so that he would recognize the one nature of humanity and divinity" of Jesus Christ (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 23). This account indicates that Catholicos Abbas was previously a Diophysite and did not take part in this Church Council, remaining faithful to Diophysitism. It is also confirmed by the letter addressed to Abbas by the Armenian Catholicos Iovannes II, who ascended the Armenian church throne after the Dvin Council in 551 (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 254, comm. 80). In this letter, the Armenian Catholicos, expressing his concern about the fate of several Albanian Monophysite bishops, who visited Armenia, wrote: "We wish that no one died among either the shepherds or the flock" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 7).

Catholicos Abbas moved the Albanian church's *cathedra* (throne, cathedral) from the north-eastern region of Chola (more precisely, from the Derbent fortress) to the capital of Albania, Partav (Barda) "on the occasion of the predatory raids of the enemies of the Lord's cross" in the year 551 (*History of Aghvan* 1861, p. 4). Thus, Partav was the third residence of the Albanian Church after Gis and Derbent. Under him, the head of the Albanian Church began to bear a higher title – "the Catholicos of Albania, Lpinia and Chola" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 23). During the time of Abbas, another important event took place in the history of the Albanian Church. After the division of the Armenian Church into Monophysite and Diophysite in approximately 574 the Syunik Church came

out of its subordination (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 253, comm. 71). In the *History of the Albanians*, it is reported that after the relocation of the Armenian cathedra , "the rulers of Syunik rejected them and did not obey either of the two" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 48). Peter, the bishop of the Syunik diocese, decided that before the reunification of the Armenian Church, Syunik bishops would be ordained by the head of the Albanian Church, and Syunik would receive the sacred myrrh from Albania (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: 48). But even after the reunification of the Armenian Church, Syunik remained for some time in the church as a subordinate of Albania. Thus, for example, the Albanian Catholicos Zacharias II (629–644), without the consent of the Armenian Church, "ordained a Syunik Vrdanes to bishopric" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 48, III: p. 23).

The Albanian church remained Diophysite until 687. Ancient Armenian sources directly indicate that Viro (595–629), who replaced Abbas on the church throne, was also a Diophysite (Bunyadov 1989, p. 49). Diophysites were the rulers of Albania during the Mihranid Dynasty; Varaz-Grigor (628–637), who converted to Christianity in the presence of the emperor of Byzantium Heraclius, and his son Jevanshir (637–681), as evidenced by the correspondence of Jevanshir and the Byzantine emperor Constans II (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 20). In 681, Varaz-Trdat (Varaz-Tiridat) became the ruler of Albania. At that time, Albania simultaneously paid tribute to three states: the Khazar Khaganate, the Arab Caliphate, and the Byzantine Empire, which was a heavy burden for the country's economy (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 12). In 687, when Nerses-Bakur ascended the cathedra of Albania, it was decided to return to Monophysitism after a long hiatus (Khalilov 2011, p. 53–55). By separating the Albanian church from the Byzantine, Varaz-Tiridat hoped to achieve a reduction in taxes paid to the Arab Caliphate, the main rival of Byzantium in the Western Asia, since Albania was part of the Caliphate, and most of the tribute was given to the Muslim state.

The transition to Monophysitism led to tragic consequences for the family of Varaz-Tiridat. In 699, during negotiations with the Emperor Tiberius III for tax decreases to Byzantium, the ruler of Albania and his sons Vardan and Gagik were arrested (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 12). To release her family members from Byzantine captivity, the spouse of Varaz-Tiridat Sparama, acting together with the Catholicos Nerses-Bakur, converted the Albanian Church in favor of Diophysitism. And this was despite the fact that the Monophysite Shero, who did not belong to the Mihranid dynasty, seized the Albanian throne that was left empty with the absence of Varaz-Tiridat (Khalilov 2011, p. 53–55). Shero was aware that in the current new situation, Varaz-Tiridat could restore his power in Albania. To prevent this, Shero and the Monophysite opposition led by him appealed to the Armenian Church asking for support. In 704 the Armenian Catholicos Eghia (Elias I), in turn, informed the Arab caliph Abdul-Melik about the situation in Albania and, with his approval, achieved the overthrow of Nerses-Bakur and the established the Partav Union of the Albanian and Armenian Monophysite Churches (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: 4–9). Since the union was headed by the Armenian

Catholicos, the Old Armenian language (Grabar) became the official church language, and each newly elected Catholicos of Albania was approved by the head of the union with the consent of the Albanian clergy (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 8). In other areas of activity, the Albanian church had complete freedom, as evidenced by the canonical decrees of the Partav Church Council convened by the new Catholicos of Albania, Simeon, in the capital of the state – Partav (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 11). The ancient Armenian language could not completely supplant the Albanian language spoken by the Christian population of the country, at least until the 13th century. The 13th-century author Kirakos reported that many of the church leaders in Albania knew the Armenian language (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 132). And this, in turn, indicates that among these leaders were those who did not speak this language. Without a doubt, in this case we are talking about the Albanian Catholicos – contemporaries of Kirakos. After a Byzantine five-year captivity, Varaz-Tiridat returned to Albania in 704 (*Aghvan History* 1861, III: p. 12). In 705, after Shero was arrested and sent by the Arabs into exile to Syria (*Aghvan history* 1861, III: 16), Varaz-Tiridat regained his power, and Albania began to pay tribute only to the Arab Caliphate (*Aghvan History* 1861, III: p. 12).

The change in foreign policy did not lead to an attenuation of pressure exerted by the Caliphate on the Albanian Church. So, during the time of the Albanian Catholicos Ioannes (798–823), the Albanian church was forced to move his central residence from the city of Partav (Barda), located on the plain, to Berda (Berdakan, Berdak), which served before only as a summer residence; it is located in the highlands of Albania, on the banks of the Terter River (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 7). Thus, the Catholicoses of Albania were forced to winter in difficult mountain conditions. It is interesting to note that eventually, by the year 900, Partav became the residence of the Metropolitan of the East Syrian Nestorian Church (Kasumova 2005, p. 40).

In the last quarter of the 9th century, there were acts of disobedience by the Albanian Church against the Armenian Catholicos. In 876, at the initiative of the Albanian priest and philosopher Misail, the post of Catholicos of the Albanian Church was given to Samuel (876–893) by election, who began his activities without the ordination of the Armenian Catholicos (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: 23). The Catholicos was temporarily forced to reconcile himself "with the troubles of Samuel and Misail" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 21). Only a year later, in 877, Samuel received ordination from the Armenian Catholicos Gevorg II (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: pp. 21, 23). The disobedience of the Albanian church was a harbinger of the formation of a new political situation in Albania and Armenia, which led in 885 to the restoration of the Albanian centralized state by Grigor-Hamam (*History of Aghvan* 1861, p. 21; Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 78). Later the Albanian Church sometimes resisted the Armenian Church. Grigor-Hamam for 17 years (952–969), the Albanian church was Diophysite under King Ishkhanik (grandson of Grigor-Hamam) (Khalilov 2011, pp. 61–62). After the collapse of the Albanian centralized state in 1008,

the population of Northwest Albania strictly adhered to the Diophysite teaching , while the Albanian Church officially continued to remain Monophysite (Nasibli 2005; Khalilov 2011, pp. 64–65).

The missionary work of the Albanian church among the northern nomads – settlers from Central Asia. From the time of Catholicos Grigoris, the Albanian church tried to "close the enemy's gates and stop the invasion of adversaries by the divine power of the cross" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: 25), i .e. nomads. Albanian tradition attributes the first preaching activity in Chola (Northeast Albania) among the Masguts (or Massageteans) to St. Elisha, a disciple of the Apostle Thaddaeus (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 6). However, in fact, when St. Elisha preached Christianity in Chola, there were no Masguts there yet.

According to Agatangeghos (5th century), the ruler of the Masach-Huns (Masguts) was part of the Transcaucasian delegation sent to the emperor Constantine at the beginning of the 4th century (Agatangeghos, *History of the reign of Tiridat*, § 165).

Historians usually calculate the year 337 as the first time Grigoris (the leader of the Albanian churches) visited the land of the Masguts (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 14) Some researcher, however, do not consider the data of the *History of the Albanians* about St. Moses, St. Daniel and St. Elijah – the sons of the king of the Masguts Senas, who, living on a mountain near Amaras, studied with St. Grigoris together with 3870 members of the Christian community, who were exterminated by another Masgut, King Sanesan, on August 19, 337 (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 5). Moreover, the Masguts and their king Sanesan, after listening to a speech by Grigoris in 337, "accepted everything with joy and believed the word of the gospel **not for the first time**" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 14). Based on this, it can be argued that, in contrast to the second tragic account, the first attempt of Grigoris was successful. During the first visit, he took three Masgut princes with him to Albania to learn Christian doctrine, and these later died as a result of the pogrom against the Christian community by the new Masgut king, Sanesan. However, Sanesan was not able to eradicate Christianity in his country. Among the Catholicos who were in the residence of the Albanian church in Chola, there was remembered "the archbishop of Huns, Iunan, who was in the country of the Masguts" at the very end of the 4th century (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 19, III: p. 23). Judging by the funeral monuments of the Masguts found in Southeast Dagestan (Palasa-Syrt, Kukhmazkunt, Ashagy Stal Gazmalar, etc.) and Northeast Azerbaijan (Gukhuroba, Gijanoba, Khujbala, Sandygtepe), Christianity was not widespread among them. In certain periods, only members of the royal dynasty and their close associates were Christians (Khalilov 2011a).

In the 5th century, there was a significant event. At this time the Huns who inhabited region that is north of Albania, during their regular campaign in Transcaucasia, adopted Christianity within the territory of Albania (History of Aghvan 1861, I: pp. 29–30). This happened "a little after St. Mashtots" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 28). Considering

that Mesrop Mashtots passed away in the year 440, it can be argued that this campaign through the Derbent passage was completed somewhat later. The only Hun invasion in the 5th century, during which these regions (Albania, Iberia and Armenia) suffered occurred in 452, which is mentioned by ancient Armenian author Yeghishe (5th century). Among various listed dates of this campaign, however, this year does not appear (Jafarov 1985, pp. 54–60), while some researchers do consider the fact that the date of the campaign – the year 452 – is was near the death of Mashtots. By comparing the information of Yegishe and the *History of the Albanians* there is little doubt that these sources speak of the same event. The Hun general who adopted the Christian name Theophilos, his sons (later known as St. Moses and Anerolog), as well as the third part of the Hun army, which was under his command were later killed by order of the king of the Huns (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 30). In other words, there were no Christian nomads among the Huns who left Transcaucasia.

Some Christian funerary monuments in Albania indicate that later among the Albanian Christians there were representatives of individual nomadic tribes. In Mingachevir there are burials in the catacombs, performed according to Christian practices, as well as images of the cross on the walls of a number of passages within the catacombs; on some skeletons there were found remains of clothing with an equilateral cross embroidered on them with yellow threads (Göyüşov1984, p. 62–63). For comparison, we note that the image of the cross on the wall of the catacomb was also observed in the burial mounds of Peschanka near Nalchik and Upper Chiryurt in the Northern Dagestan (Gmyrya 1986, p. 101). Judging by the artificial deformation (cranial elongation) of the skulls of several skeletons in the Christian burials of Kabala and, given that this city, according to the Arab author Baladzori (9th century), had another name – Khazar, it can be argued that these burials belonged to the northern nomads who settled on the territory of Albania. The burial of a person with artificial deformation of the skull in a Christian church at Kish (Fig. 1) suggests that among the nomadic Christians of Albania there were those who had some special role within the church.

In the 6th century, the eyes of the Albanian (Arran) church were turned to the northern regions, where numerous nomadic tribes lived near the borders of Albania. The first Arranian missionary among the northern nomads was Bishop Cardost. Some researchers date the first arrival of Cardost in the territory of the Huns to the year 515, others – to 537 (Artamonov 1962, p. 93; Jafarov 1985, pp. 86-87), but these dates do not correspond to the chronology of events noted by the Syrian author Zacharias Rhetor, who completed his chronicle in 555 (*Travelers about Azerbaijan* 1961, p. 19-21). Zacharias Rhetor described the activities of Cardost according to the words of two Syrians. These Syrians were captured by the Sasanian army in 503. After some time, the Arranians sold them to the Huns. The Syrians stayed with the Huns for 34 years and returned from captivity to their homeland in 555. This suggests that the Syrians were sold to the Huns in 521. At the same time, the bishop

of Arran, Cardost went with these Christian captives to the country of the Huns, where in 522 he met Probus, the envoy of the Byzantine emperor Justin I. Thus, Cardost could not have went to the Huns in 515, since at that time there were no Christian captives, for whose sake his trip was organized. The year 537 is also an inaccurate date, since the exact time of the Embassy of Probus is known, that is 522,which is the only moment he could have met Cardost. Considering the implacable attitude of Justin I towards the Monophysites, it can be stated that the Albanian Church in 521 was a Diophysite religious organization, otherwise Probus would not have met with Cardost.

Seven years after the arrival to the country of the Huns, Cardost "published the Scripture in the Hunnic language there" according to Zacharias Rhetor, this event was dated to 528. Cardost remained there for fourteen years. This means that the mission of Cardost was completed in 535. According to M. I. Artamonov, the baptism of the Hun's prince Grod (Gord) in 528 at Constantinople corresponded to Cardost's activities (Artamonov 1962, p. 94). Given that the date Grod's conversion and the year when the Holy Scripture in the Hunnic language was published coincide, it cannot be excluded that Grod (Gord) studied the Scripture in his native language.

Of particular interest is the etymology of the name Cardost. According to Zacharias Rhetor, Cardost meant "called by God" (*Travelers about Azerbaijan* 1961, p. 20). For comparison, we note that the Kassite word *kari/a*, Elamite *kuri*, Lullubey *kiurum* (*um* – with an Akkadian suffix) meant "deity". Apparently, the first part of the name of the Arran bishop had a common origin with the above lexemes. In the same group of words you can include the name of one of the gods of the Huns of the Northern Dagestan – Kuar (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 40).

The last stage of the missionary activity of the Albanian clergy among nomads is associated with the name of Bishop Israel. In 681, the Catholicos of Albania, Eghiazar, during peace negotiations with the

Fig. 1. Kish. Stone-lined tomb

Hunnic Prince Alp-Ilitver, prepared the ground for the mission of Israel. Eghiazar delivered "many divine speeches with which he brought them closer to the fear and love of God" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: 36). Bishop Israel preached Christianity among the Huns who inhabited the current territory of Northern Dagestan in 682. In order to free the Huns from the influence of pagan ideology, Bishop Israel was forced to even resort to violent methods. Six centuries before the first European *auto-da-fe*, he committed the act of burning at the stake some Hunnic priests of a heathen cult (*Aghvan History* 1861, II: p. 41).

The archaeological research conducted during the 1970–80s, near the Upper Chiryurt burial ground in Northern Dagestan, discovered the remains of four early medieval churches (Magomedov 1983, p. 167; Magomedov 1986; Pletnyova 1986, p. 33). The researchers associated the appearance of churches in the Upper Chiryurt with the visitation of the Albanian bishop Israel in the area of the Huns in the year 682 (Magomedov 1979, p. 196; Pletneva 1986, p. 33). Also the *History of the Albanians* reported about the building of a church in this region by Israel (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 41).The researchers identified the architectural ties of these churches with the Christian church of Transcaucasia (Magomedov 1979; Magomedov 1986).

The shape and design of the Upper Chiryurt churches are simplified versions of the Transcaucasian examples, including the Albanian churches (Magomedov 1983, p. 168–169). The Upper-Chiryurt artifacts include crosses with characteristic configurations of curls with circles intended for inlays, corresponding to Albanian prototypes (Magomedov 1983, p. 169). In one of the Upper Chiryurt catacomb burials, there was found a bronze pendant, on which, above the cruciform sign, there is an image of a woman with a baby in her arms (Fig. 2.*2*). According to M. M. Mammayev, this figure displays the image of the Virgin Mary with Jesus (Mammayev 1976, pp. 97–102). A similar pendant (Fig. 2.*1*, 3, photographic plate 22) was taken from a burial ground at Khujbala (North-Eastern Azerbaijan), but the report on this artifact was missing (Khalilov 1965, pp. 154–162, Fig. 4/1). A golden cross found in the kurgan (burial mound) No. 20 of the Upper Chiryurt (Magomedov 1983, Fig. 20/7), reminds us of the *History of the Albanians* account about the production of golden crosses for the Huns by the Albanian bishop Israel (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 41).

The discovered stele with the image of the cross, which was installed on the pedestal of the church No. 2, is also associated with the Transcaucasian Christian traditions (Magomedov 1983, pp. 169–170). It is believed that the Church No. 2 was not covered, as it was difficult to entice nomads into enclosed churches (Magomedov 1983, p. 169).

Among the churches of the Upper Chiryurt, there is the so-called "Church No. 1", which is notable for its relatively complex design (Fig. 4.*3*). This church structure has a rectangular shape outside and an internal space subdivided by bays. The sanctuary (bema) is also constructed in the shape of a rectangle. Among the artifact finds, there was an interesting sandstone cruciform altar, and part of its surface was covered with red ocher. An Albanian source describes the manufacture of a cross by Israel painted "from top to bottom with

color" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 41); this may be illustrated by the cruciform altar of the church No. 1 of the Upper Chiryurt (Magomedov 1979, pp. 188–189. Fig. 4).

The Albanian church Urekvank (Nagorno-Karabakh) has almost identical structural elements: the rectangular shape of the exterior, the subdivided space, and the rectangular bema (Fig. 4.*2*). According to the epigraphic data, the distinctive details of the layout of the Urekvank church was finalized in 1284, when a narthex was attached to the church (Fig. 4.*1*). And so, the church, which was part of the Urekvank monastery complex, built in the early Middle Ages in the Albanian village of Urekan, located in the vicinity of the modern village of Talysh in Nagorno-Karabakh (Mamedova 2004, p. 41). Evidence for this is provided by the masonry of walls that was erected during restoration work using parts of ancient buildings, as well as data from a written source called the *History of the Albanians*, where this church is mentioned more than once in connection with the events of the 7th century (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: pp. 29, 31, 33, 37, 38). Urekvank was known for the fact that long before the reign of the king of Albania, Vachagan III who came to power in 488, the relics (head) of St. Elisha was kept

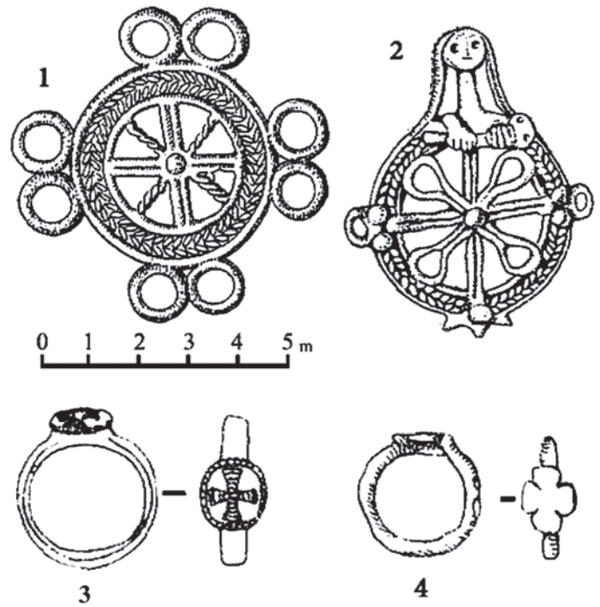

Fig. 2. Bronze pendants with the image of a cross: 1. Khujbala; 2. The Upper Chiryurt (Dagestan, Russia). Bronze seal rings with the image of a cross: 3. Enych (Anig) 4. Mingachevir

Fig. 3. Bronze pendant. Khujbala

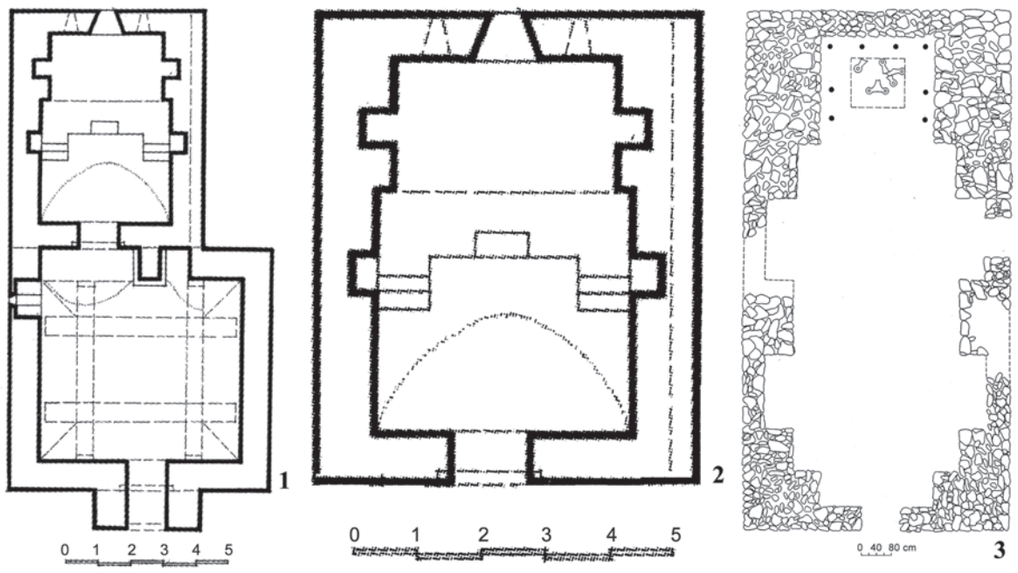

Fig. 4. Church Plans of Urekvank: 1. A church with an attached late narthex (G. G. Mamedova); 2. The primary plan of the church in No. 1; 3. Plan of an Upper Chiryurt Church (Dagestan, Russia) (M. G. Magomedov)

here (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: 7). This means that Urekvank existed, at least already in the 4th–5th centuries, and had the parallel name of "The Monastery of the Head" (Mamedova 2004, pp. 24–25).

Finally, we are approaching the revelation of a decisive factor, in our opinion, that contributed to the striking similarity of the Urekvank Church and Church No. 1 of the Upper Chiryurt (Khalilov 2016). The Albanian bishop Israel, who built the church in the area of current Upper Chiryurt, was the rector of the Urekvank monastery (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 31). According to the *History of the Albanians*, the Monastery of the Head was described as the "place of residence" of Israel (*Aghvan History* 1861, II: p. 29), his "desert solitude" (*Aghvan History* 1861, 31), his "abode" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: pp. 37, 38); and visitors saw Israel in the church of the Monastery of the Head, i.e. Urevank (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 33). He was in Urevank until his ordination as bishop of the Greater Kogmants – in the Artsakh region (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 37) in 681.

It can be assumed that Bishop Israel, after 682, preached among the northern nomads. In a letter from the governor of Albania, Varaz-Trdat and the Catholicos of Albania, Iliazar, to the Hun Prince Alp-Ilitiver, they promised to create conditions for Israel so that he could "whenever possible go to the Huns and return back" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 45). Bishop Israel later agreed to voluntarily go to Hunnic lands (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 45). After 20 years, the bishop Israel is again noted in connection with the events

of 702–705. He is mentioned as a miraculous bishop who converted **many lands of the Khazars and the Huns** to Christianity (*Aghvan History* 1861, III: 3), which meant that Israel did not limit himself to the Huns and later conducted preaching activities among the Khazars as well. Some scholars suggest that the Onogur and the Hunnic dioceses, which were part of the Gothic Metropolis in the 8th century, were organized for the Huns who adopted Christianity thanks to the efforts of Cardost and Israel, respectively (Artamonov 1962, pp. 158, 258–259).

The history of archaeological research of the Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania. The archaeological study of Albanian Christian monuments began in 1939. At that time P. D. Baranovsky excavated a three-aisled aisled basilica in the village of Gum in the Gakh region and, as a result of that, there were discovered some parts of a church that remained underground (Baranovsky 1947, p. 29). In 1940, P. D. Baranovsky continued archaeological research of Christian churches in the Gakh region, during which he excavated the Albanian church near the village of Lekit (Baranovsky 1947, pp. 31–32). [Below is a timeline of the subsequent major archaeological discoveries that has shaped our understanding of the Christian antiquities of Azerbaijan].

Between the years 1946 and 1953, S. M. Qazıyev conducted large-scale archaeological research of a complex of archaeological sites in Mingachevir, where he uncovered Albanian Christian churches and burials along with numerous buildings of various eras (Vahidov 1961). The real sensation was the identification of Albanian epigraphic materials in the area of the churches (Vahidov 1961, p. 137–148; Vahidov 1958; 1985).

In 1947 during work on a residential complex, in Beshikdag (Agdam District), there was discovered a burial in a stone sarcophagus. The historical and archaeological excavation (in 1955) and Albanian expeditions (in 1956) of the Azerbaijan History Museum under the leadership of Z. I. Yampolsky conducted research on this monument and found previously unknown written signs (Yampolsky 1960, pp. 246–250).

In 1958 began an archaeological study of the important Albanian ancient settlement – Gyavurkala (Agdam District), which continued with some interruptions until 1977 (Vahidov 1965, pp. 167–168; Göyüşov 1972a; Göyüşov 1978). In Gyavurkala were found the remains of a Christian church, as well as Christian burial places in stone boxes and a sarcophagus. Of particular interest was the stone sarcophagus, where the brother of the king of Albania, Grigor-Hamam, was buried, as evidenced by the inscription on the sarcophagus. Christian burials at Gyavurkala were discovered in subsequent years (Göyüşov 1972a, p. 26; Göyüşov et al., 1974. p. 41; Göyüşov 1978).

In 1959 the archaeological study of the ancient settlement of Gabala was commenced under the leadership of S.M. Qazıyev. Long-term archaeological research on the Selbir site contributed to discovery of Christian burials of various types (Qazıyev 1964, pp. 25–32; Qazıyev 1964a, p. 21; Qazıyev 1965, p. 154; Qazıyev 1965a, pp. 242–247; Gadirov 1980, p. 21, etc.).

In 1961-1967 R.M. Vahidov led the excavation of the Albanian settlement of Torpakkala (Gakh District), where Christian burials of the 5th–7th centuries were removed on the Sakkyzly site (Vahidov 1964; Vahidov 1965a, pp. 210–211).

In 1963 at the village of Zyumyurkhach (now Zyumyurkhan) of the Barda District, there was revealed a stone sarcophagus of the 9th–10th centuries and it was established that a Christian grave was located here (Narimanov and Rustamov 1965).

Between 1963 and 1971 R. B. Göyüşov studied Albanian Christian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh. He excavated a Christian church in the ancient city of Amaras, where in 1968 he managed to discover and explore the burial place of the Catholicos of Albania, Grigoris. Along with this, archaeological research was carried out in the church of St. Elisha (in 1971), as well as in the village of Sygnag (in 1966), where a large number of stone crosses were discovered (Göyüşov 1968; 1975; 1970; 1972, etc.).

In 1964 S. M. Qazıyev and R. B. Göyüşov in the village of Yaglevend (Fizuli District) identified and removed nine Christian stone-lined tombs (Göyüşov 1984, p. 111).

In 1969, near the village of Tezekend (Aghjabadi District), there were found the remains of a three-aisled basilica (Göyüşov 1984, pp. 86–87).

In 1970 a Christian cave church was identified on the northern foot of Bozdag Mountain, on the rocky coast of the Khachyn-Chai River (Göyüşov and Guliyev 1971, pp. 18–19). In the same year, R. B. Göyüşov, during archaeological research in Barda, the early medieval capital of Caucasian Albania, on the site of Mebed Yeri ("church site") discovered the remains of a three-aisled basilica built of rubble masonry and fired bricks, as well as three Christian burials (Göyüşov 1971, pp. 226–227; Göyüşov 1984, pp. 88, 110).

In 1971 archaeological excavations in Kilsedag (Gabala District) revealed the ruins of an Albanian round Christian church (Vahidov and Guliyev 1972, pp. 31–32; Vahidov et al., 1972).

In 1972, at the village of Shykhly (Agdash District), there were discovered the remains of a three-aisled aisled basilica and three Christian underground burials (Göyüşov 1984, p. 88).

In 1974–1977 the Tovuz Group of the Shamkir Expedition (directed by R. M. Vahidov) conducted systematic archaeological excavations on the ancient settlement of Torpakkala (historical Khunan) and at the same time carried out a survey there. Thereby, in 1974, they studied the remains of a one-aisled Christian church near the village of Kirzan (Tovuz District) on the right bank of the Kura River (Vahidov and Guliyev 1975, p. 51), and in 1975 a complex of Christian monuments of Askipar in the Gazakh region was surveyed (Vahidov et al., 1977, p. 489; Vahidov et al., 1978, p. 46). In 1975–1977, archaeological excavations in Torpakkala (Tovuz District) revealed the ruins of an Albanian Christian church (Vahidov and Guliyev 1978, 1979; Vahidov et al.1977; 1978 p. 46).

In 1975 there were recorded the remains of a three-aisled Christian church in the village of Tatlı of the Agstafa region (Göyüşov and Nuriyev 1978, p. 43).

In 1980, near the village of Alkhasly of the Lachin District, there was studied a rectangular Christian church, called by the local population as *Alban-bank* (Aliyev 1981, p. 415).

Since 1980 A. A. Karakhmedova conducted archaeological research in the Sheki-Zagatal region. In 1980-1986, the main attention was paid to the study of the Eddi Kilse monastery complex (Gakh District). The archaeological excavations were carried out in some of the churches included in this complex, which also revealed Christian tombs here (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 6; Karakhmedova 1986b, pp. 77–78; Karakhmedova 1986, pp. 15–16; Karakhmedova 1988, pp. 40–42; Karakhmedova 1990, pp. 36–39). In 1981 there was studied the chapel in the village of Bash Geinyuk of the Shaki District (Karakhmedova 1986a, pp. 74–77). In other churches (Kish, Orta Zeizid, Mamrukh, Gebizdere, Pipan, Bukhovlu, Mazymgaray and others) located in this zone, the studies were usually of exploratory character, during which Christian burials of various types were also discovered (Karakhmedova 1986).

In 1985 the Gazakh group of the Gyanja-Gazakh expedition in the village of Kemerli of the Gazakh District, as well as near the settlement of Agtepe, recorded the remains of two Albanian churches (Muradova 1986).

In 1986 during archaeological excavations carried out at the site of Ustajan-tepe, located near the village of Bairamkokh, Gabala District, there were discovered burials placed in stone sarcophagi (Gadirov 1986, p. 44).

In 1987, the Gazakh expedition uncovered five Christian churches on the mountain of Aveidag (Kyoroglukhini, Garabulag, Damjyly, Gyzylgaya, Shishgaya) (Muradova, Rustamov 1992, pp. 54–55).

The second stage of active archaeological study of Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania covers the beginning of the 21st century. In 2000–2001, for the first time, an international Azerbaijani-Norwegian expedition was organized, which conducted archaeological excavations in a church in the village of Kish (Shaki District). The excavations made it possible to establish the time of construction of the building and restoration work associated with this monument. The research revealed Christian burials of various types and a panoply of products made of ceramics, glass, and metal (Kerimov 2000; Kerimov and Sturfiel, 2003).

In 2003–2004 exploratory studies were conducted in the cave monastery complex of Keshikchidag (Agstafa District) (Mansurov 2005, pp. 71–72).

In 2004 2005 V. I. Kerimov studied the Albanian Christian church in the village of Orta Zeizid (Shaki District). They examined the phases when the church functioned, and revealed Christian burials (Karimov 2008).

In 2006 V. I. Kerimov carried out archaeological excavations in the church of Kyurmyuk (Gakh District). The studies have shown that the current church building was erected in the 19th century on the ancient foundation of the Albanian era (Kerimov, Aliyev, Kerimov, and Effendi, 2007).

In 2007 on the ancient settlement of Sandygtepe I (Guba District) M. J. Khalilov discovered a unique find – a fragment of a child's skull; on its front part there was an extant image of two Christian saints made with black paint, as well as a one-line inscription, severely damaged, not yet deciphered. Judging by the stratigraphy of the settlement, the skull belongs to the 10th–11th centuries (Khalilov 2011, pp. 18, 217–218).

In 2007–2008 V. I. Kerimov conducted research in the round church of Lekit and revealed the remains of three more Christian churches in the Gakh District (Kerimov, Aliyev, and Kerimov 2007; Kerimov et al. 2008).

In 2009 the Shamkir Archaeological Expedition (directed by T. M. Dostiyev) discovered a Christian burial, a metal cross, and also fragments of a stone cross on the medieval settlement of Shamkir (*Medieval city of Shamkir* 2010, p. 10, 234).

In 2010 the Khyzinsk Archaeological Expedition (directed by G. O. Qoşqarlı) in the Atachai burial ground investigated eleven early Christian burials in the stone boxes (Qoşqarlı, Babayev, Asadov, and Babayeva 2011, pp. 274–275).

In 2012-2013 N. A. Alyshov, during archaeological excavations in Kilselitepe (Gabala District), uncovered the remains of the Albanian Christian church, built in the 7th–8th centuries that functioned until the late Middle Ages (Alyshov 2013).

All of the above information refers only to the monuments that have been studied by archaeologists. Proceeding from this, the reader should not have a false idea about the number of Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania located on the territory of the modern Azerbaijan Republic. Their real number, while still awaiting researcher, is counted by the hundreds. Judging by the *History of the Albanians*, King Vachagan III the Pious alone built as many churches in Albania as there were days in a year (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 22).

The Christian Churches. Christian churches represented a new type of monument that appeared in early medieval Albania. The studies carried out to date have established that Albanian Christian church, according to their layout consist of eight types: 1) single-aisle, rectangular; 2) three-aisled basilica; 3) cruciform; 4) round; 5) three-hall; 6) cavernicolous; 7) half dugouts; 8) portable tent-churches (tabernacle).

The monuments of the **first type** are the most numerous due to their simple layout. In one group of such churches, the apse has an arc-shaped form extending beyond the walls of the rectangular plan. Among the monuments of this type (the best studied one from the archaeological point of view) is the church in the village of Kish (Shaki District). According to the *History of the Albanians*, this church "was the mother of the Eastern churches" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 48).

The semicircular apse of the Kish church (Fig. 5; 6.*1*; photo 17) to some extent departs from the quadrangular layout (Fig. 6.*1–3*). Six windows are located under the dome on a high round drum, and illuminate the interior well. The walls of the church were built of neatly hewn limestones. A. A. Karakhmedova recorded traces of saints painted with color

Fig. 5. Kish Church

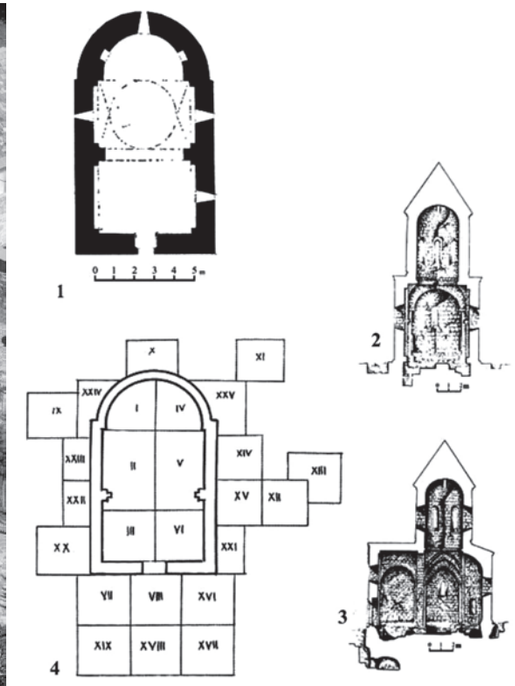

Fig. 6. Kish Church: 1. Plan; 2–3. Vertical sections; 4. Archaeological sites (V. I. Kerimov and B. Sturfiel)

on the walls under several layers of plaster (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 20). The length of the inner space of the church is 10.24 m, the width is 5.16 m (Kerimov and Sturfiel, 2003, p. 39). Excavations (Fig. 6.*4*) established that the Kish Christian church was built on the site of the pagan sanctuary belonging to the third millennium BC (Karimov and Sturfiel, 2003, p. 129). Usually, Christian preachers, spreading their religion, tried to build churches in the religious places of idol-worshipers or, through reconstruction, converted pagan sanctuaries into Christian ones (Mamedova 2004, p. 34).

The total thickness of the identified construction is 2.20 m (Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003, p. 42). The Kish Temple was continuously functioning from the 2nd to 1st centuries BC. During the first construction stage (which covered that time period), at the entrance to the temple, there was a small pagan cult structure built on an early foundation (Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003, p. 43). The second construction period corresponded to the 1st–3rd centuries AD, and then a Christian church was built on another, lower foundation. At the next stage, during the 5th and 6th centuries, a church was built on the upper foundation, which has survived to this day. The diversity of foundations is confirmed by the lack of a building bond between them, as well as the use of various materials (river stones, stone boulders, and large limestone). The cohesive solution consisted of lime with the addition of small

gravel. The discovery of tile fragments show that this material was used in overlapping the dome (Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003, pp. 40–41). If the early altar had a height of 35–45 cm, then after the reconstruction in the third stage, it was raised by 45 cm and turned out to be at the level of 90 cm (Kerimov and Sturfiel, 2003, p. 131). According to B. Sturfiel, the different height of the altar of the Kish church in different periods is explained by a change in the religious current, i.e. the transition from Diophysitism to Monophysitism. The minister of the Diophysite church, the representative of Christ, who stood on the altar, was closer to the parishioners than the Monophysite priest, since the Diophysites, unlike the Monophysites, perceived Christ not only as God, but also as a person (Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003, pp. 131–132). There is an account in the *History of the Albanians* that the Catholicos of the Albanian Church of Nerses-Bakur in 701, in the process of changing its religious course, "destroyed many church altars" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 3). This information serves as additional evidence to support the interpretation of the site by B. Sturfiel (Alyshov 2014, p. 11).

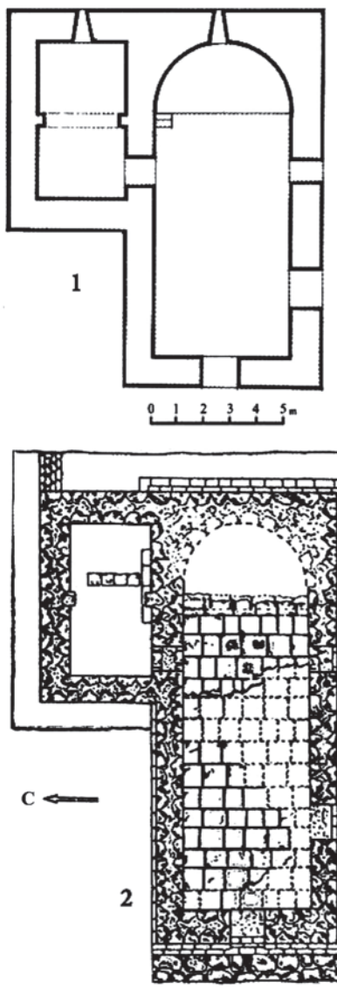

Fig. 7. The Church of Gyavurkala. Plans: 1 (G. G. Mamedova); 2 (R. M. Vahidov)

Based on the results of radiocarbon analysis of a charcoal sample, it was found that in 990–1160 the Kish church was reconstructed for the last time. Following on from the fact that St. Elisha preached in Albania in 56, the construction of the church in Kish can be attributed to this time.

The *Gyavurkala Church* (Agdam District) was discovered during archaeological excavations in the western part of the citadel of the settlement (Vahidov 1965; Göyüşov 1972a). The semicircular apse does not extend beyond the rectangle (Fig. 7.*1–2*). The altar is located at a height of 45–60 cm from the floor of the hall. The length of the hall is 11.95 m, the width is 5.25 m. In the northwest area, the hall leads to the altar. In addition to the passage to the altar, there were found three more entrances to the hall: two openings were in the southern wall and one in the western wall. The construction of the church was in limestone. The stones in the masonry were so carefully chiseled that there was no need for facing work. The cohesive material was lime mortar with the addition of amiesite. The floor of the hall was paved

with finely hewn stone slabs. On some of them there are mortises cut with geometric forms (quadrangle, triangle, trapezoid). Fragments of tiles, square fired bricks, simple and glazed ceramics, and objects made of glass and metal were recorded on the area of the church. Near the eastern wall of the church, there was found a part of a stone sarcophagus where, judging by the inscription, the brother of the king of Albania Grigor-Hamam (he rose to power in 885) was buried. Crosses carved from stone, as well as cross reliefs chiseled on stone slabs, as well as geometric and floral ornaments on the stones, plaster architectural elements adorned various parts of the church (Vahidov 1965, p. 175).

The analysis of archaeological and epigraphic materials the Gyavurkala church indicates a date traced back to the 8th–9th (Göyüşov 1984, p. 85) or 8th–10th centuries (Vahidov 1965, pp. 178–179). These dates are additionally confirmed by another argument: in the time of Grigor-Hamam, the Albanian church was Monophysite; the bema's height of the Gyavurkala Church (60 cm) testifies that this church belonged to the Monophysites.

The *Red Church* is located on a hill near the village of Bina (formerly Doma) of the Khojavend District. The southern wall and the ceiling of the church are ruined. The Red Church was 11 m long and 6.45 m wide. Near the church there are remains of other buildings, as well as the fortress wall surrounding the hill. Locals call the location of the church as the "Royal Chambers". The monument is built from roughly processed stone. The church had two entrances: from south and west. A building inscription over the western entrance reported: "In 449 (i. e. the year 1000), during the reign of the King Gagik, the son of Muse [Movses], me – Voski [Sophia], the daughter of Muse, built a house of God..." (Mamedova 2004, p. 86). Thus, in spite of the fact that there were no archaeological excavations here, the epigraphic material allows determining the exact date of construction of this monument. In the course of archaeological research, there were revealed the remains of four Albanian churches of Mingachevir – on the left bank of the river. Kura, in the citadel, in the center of the settlement No. 2, in the area, once-called "the site of the churches" (Vahidov 1961, pp. 94–128). It was exactly here where it was discovered, still reliably identified artifacts showing Albanian epigraphy (Fig. 8–10). It is supposed that the Settlement No. 2 was a town, covering 14 hectares of land, where there was the residence of one of the Albanian bishops (Vahidov 1961, p. 149).

In the construction of Mingachevir churches, builders used square (30–50×30 – 50×8–12 cm) and rectangular (30–50×25 – 45×6–12 cm) mud bricks and, in rare cases, fired bricks (Vahidov 1961, p. 103). The cohesive material was a clay solution mixed with straw (Vahidov 1954, 136; Vahidov 1961, pp. 25, 116).

Mingachevir Church I (Fig. 11.*1–2*), is stratigraphically located at the lowest area of the settlement, built over a layer consisting of amiesite. The interior of the church was 19.40 m long and 7.70 m wide. No material was found in the church area that could have been used for the roofing; therefore, there is an assumption that the structure had a mudbrick ceiling (Vahidov 1961, p. 97).

Fig. 8. Clay candlestick with Albanian inscriptions. Church site. Mingachevir

Fig. 9. Clay candlestick with Albanian inscriptions. Church site. Mingachevir

Fig. 10. Rectangular Stone with reliefs depicting of a Tree of Life and two peacocks, and includes an Albanian inscriptions. Church II. Mingachevir

Inside, in front of the northern and southern walls at approximately equal distance from each other, there are twelve rectangular ledges (six in front of each wall) that do not have a constructional purpose with the walls. It is assumed that wooden columns were installed on these ledges (thus, serving as bases) (Khalilov 2011, p. 102). The absence of a doorway on the western wall gave rise to the idea that the entrance to the church was located in the destroyed eastern wall. Based on this, G. G. Mamedova considers this construction a pagan temple with an altar on the western side (Mamedova 2004, pp. 35–36). R. M. Vahidov, who a while back in 1957 suggested that this structure was connected with idol worshipers (Vahidov 1957, p. 12), then abandoned this hypothesis (Vahidov 1961, p. 127). R. B. Göyüşov and R. M. Vahidov, who considered this building as a Christian monument, explained the inconsistency of some elements of this structure to the standards of Christian architecture because of the fact that in the early Christian era, these standards were not yet finalized and were fluid (Göyüşov 1984, pp. 83–84). R. M. Vahidov first dated this monument to the 2nd–4th centuries then, having corrected his data, he came to conclusion that it is possible to attribute this church to the end of the 4th – early 5th century (Vahidov 1957, p. 12; Vahidov 1961, p. 128). G. G. Mamedova, dated this religious building to the end of the 3rd century given that the Settlement No. 2 was founded in the pagan period – that is, in the 3rd century (Mamedova 2004, p. 36).

Mingachevir Church IV consists of five rooms (Fig. 11.*3–4*). Christian burials were found on the southern and southeastern sides of the church and they chronologically correspond to the church. Archaeological excavations determined that this religious building was destroyed by a fire, where the first building was severely damaged, which is smaller in size (4.2×2.5 m)

in comparison to other buildings located here. The *second* room (4.2×3.8 m) is notable for the largest number of Christian religious objects found at the site (about 25 metal crosses, censer, etc.), as well as plaster wall decoration with an inscription. Among the finds in the *third* room (5×4.2 m), there are fragments of the wall painting, consisting of ornaments with geometric (circle, square, spiral, etc.) and floral (three-petal flower) motifs in red, green, yellow, white, blue, and other paints of plant origin (Qazıyev 1948, p. 398), a fragment of the image of a horseman on a stone, etc. (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 83–84, Fig. 2–4). The *fourth* room (7.8×6 m) was a bema of the church. The apse (where the altar was located), extending beyond the rectangle, had a height of 35 cm, in other words, was characteristic of Diophysite churches. In this room, there were discovered fragments of glazed ceramics, which was used as one of the indicators of date. The *fifth* room is the largest (11×6 m) one in this church. It differs from others because of the lack of any fragments of tile found here. This gave experts the basis to suggest that it had no overlapping tiles for roofing, but instead it was used as an atrium (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 86; Useynov et al. 1963, p. 36). The presence of an example a Roman atrium common in early Christian basilicas, here in Mingachevir is considered a unique phenomenon for the region (Mamedova 2004, p. 37). Considering the hoard that consisted of coins minted between the years 748–841, and buried already in the ruins of the building, as well as fragments of glazed ceramics, it was concluded that this church was built in the 8th century and functioned until the early 9th century (Vahidov 1961, pp. 125–126).

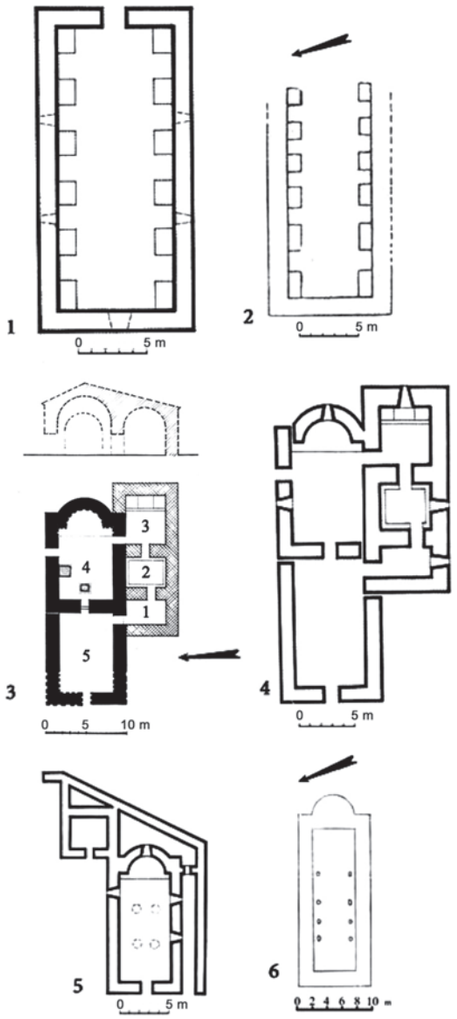

Fig. 11. Churches of Mingachevir. Plans: 1, 4, 5 (G. G. Mamedova), 2, 3, 6 (R. M. Vahidov)

Archaeological study of the *Torpakkala* site (the historical Albanian city of Khunan) in the Tovuz District, in the central part of the ancient settlement revealed the remains of a one-aisled rectangular church (Vahidov et al. 1977; Vahidov et al. 1978, p. 46). The church

was 6.50 m long and 4 m wide. The foundation was built of large river stones. The walls are one meter thick and are constructed of rectangular limestone blocks with a smoothly hewn surface. Lime mortar was used as a binder material. The entrance to the church was in the western wall. The semicircular apse located on the eastern side does not go beyond the rectangular outline of the church (Fig. 12). This apse rises above the floor of the hall to a height of 30 cm. A fragment of a quadrangular (44×28 cm) stone pillar was placed in the center (Vahidov and Guliyev 1978, p. 495). It is assumed that this is a fragment of a pedestal of the altar's cross (Vahidov and Guliyev 1979, p. 32). The uncovered fragments of tiles were intended for the roof of the church. Perhaps this structure had a gable roof (Vahidov and Guliyev 1979, p. 32). A stone font in the form of a cube (40×40×40 cm) with a drain at the bottom was found in the northeast corner of the hall. The thickness of its walls is 6–6.5 cm. The font was covered with a stone slab in the shape of an oval disk (45×38×5.5 cm). The church was dated to the 7th–8th centuries (Vahidov and Guliyev 1979, p. 32). It was established that after the destruction of the church it was restored in the 10th–11th centuries. During the rearrangement, the hall of this religious building was significantly reduced, among building materials appeared burnt and mud bricks, instead of tiles the roof was covered with reeds coated with clay (Vahidov and Guliyev 1978, p. 496; Vahidov and Guliyev 1979, pp. 32–33).

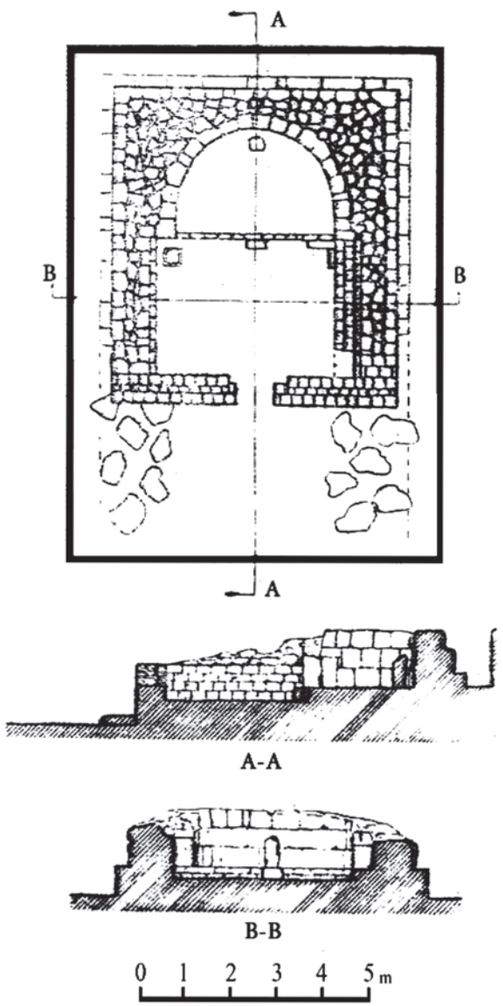

Fig. 12. Church of Torpak-Kala (Khunan). Layout (R. M. Vahidov, N. M. Guliyev)

Of particular interest is the Kyurmyuk Church (Gakh District). A semicircular altar and four elongated rectangular chapels at the corners are located in the rectangle. The length of the church is 13.6 m, its width is 8.8 m (Karimov, Aliyev, Kerimov, and Effendi 2007). The church (Fig. 13; photo 18) is stands on an east-west axis. The interior space is cruciform. The dome is located in the center. This building was built of square fired bricks (22×22 cm).

river stones were also used in its construction (Mamedova 2004, p. 124–125). The archaeological excavations allowed distinguishing four construction and restoration stages in the history of this church: 1) 1st–3rd centuries; 2) 4th–7th centuries; 3) 8th–11th centuries; 4) 19th century (Kerimov, Aliyev, Kerimov and Effendi 2007, pp. 23–28).

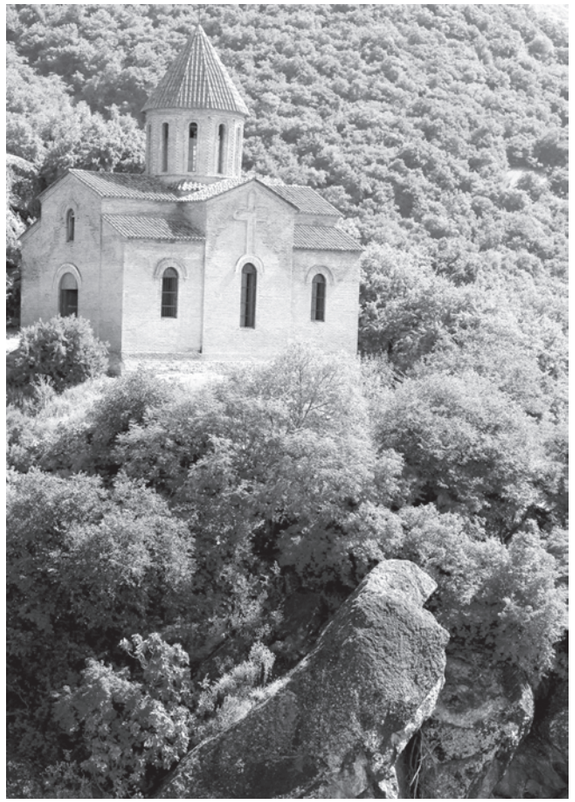

Fig.13. Kyurmyuk Church

Near the village of *Mazymgarai* (Balaken District) there was an investigated church with a length of 6.30 m and a width of 3.30 m (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 26). The rectangular chapel in the area (Fig. 14.*1–2*) rises on a socle composed of well-hewn limestone. The apse is located on the eastern side, extending beyond the rectangular frame of the structure. The apse, which is five-sided on the outside, has a horseshoe-shaped interior, according to the plan. This religious structure has three entrances: in the western, northern, and southern walls. The river-stone masonry chapel is covered with a tile roof. The excavation trenches dug by A. A. Karakhmedova near the church walls in addition to the archaeological material, revealed bones in the presumably Christian burials (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 26). The chapel is dated to the 5th–6th centuries, or, according to some scholars, more specifically the 6th century (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 27; Gajiyev 2001; Mamedova 2004, p. 40).

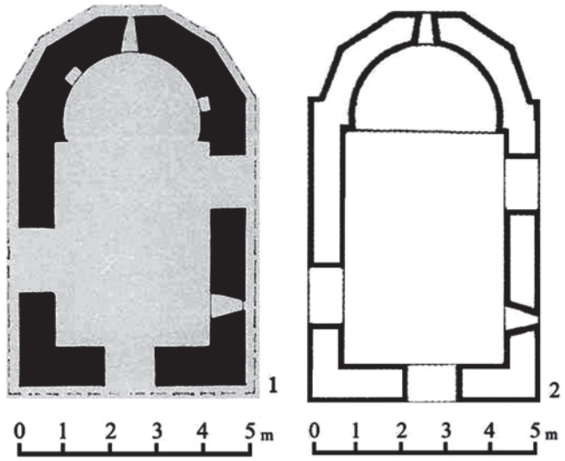

Fig. 14. The church of Mazymgarai. Plans: 1 (A. A. Karakhmedova); 2 (G. G. Mamedova)

On the outskirts of the *village of Bash Gyoinyuk* (Shaki District), there was studied a chapel with a length of four meters and a width of 3.70 m (Karakhmedova 1986a). The walls of the church were made of river stones and lined with well-hewn limestone slabs. A lime solution was used as a cohesive material (mortar). There are wide stone steps in front of the entrance on the western side. Along the southern, northern, and western walls of the hall, there is a ledge constructed of limestone and river stones with a cohesive lime mortar. The height of this protrusion is 0.25 m and 0.20 m wide. It can be assumed that this ledge served as a support for the walls. The church was attributed to the 4th–6th centuries (Karakhmedova 1986a, p. 77). However, given that among the archaeological materials identified here there are fragments of ceramic vessels made on the potter's wheel, this religious building can be dated later to the 6th–7th centuries (Khalilov 2011, p. 112).

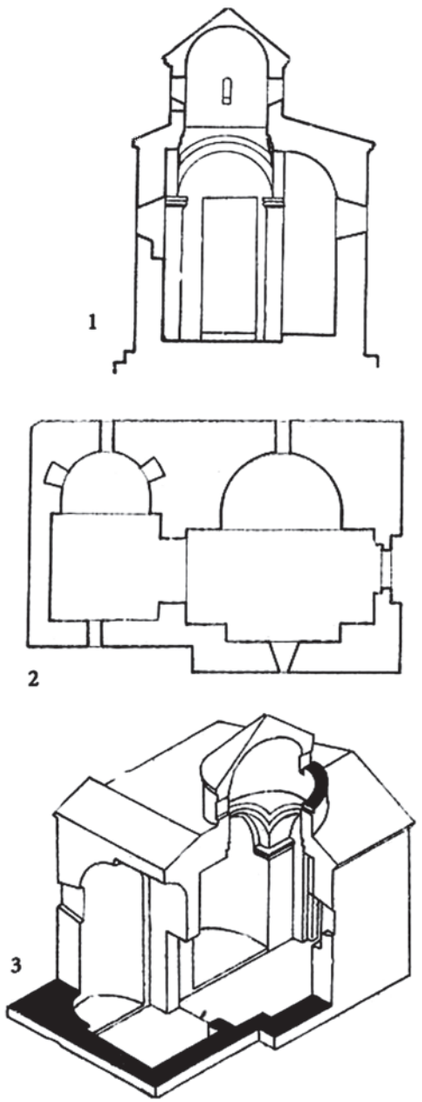

Fig. 15. Church of Avei. Plan (D. A. Akhundov)

There are also other known churches of this type (for example, Jalut, Chaikend, Gozlu, Ballygaya, Airivank, Avei (Fig. 15), Bideiz, Bash Kyungyut, etc.). The churches of the 9th–10th centuries at Gozlu (Vaguas) (Fig. 16) and Airivank (Gedabek District) (Fig. 17) differ from other Albanian churches because their pastophoria are located – not on the left and right sides of the apes but to the west of it, in the northwest and southwest corners of the structure. These monuments, however, have not been studied archaeologically.

The three-aisled basilica, which is the **second type** of Christian church in Albania, was developed as an architectural form already in the antiquity. In the early Christian period, increasing number of people converted to Christianity and they were invited into churches to perform communal prayers, which was one of the main tasks of the pastors. Due to its relatively large size, the basilica was more suitable for these purposes. This factor allowed the basilica to retain an important position in Christian world (Yakobson 1985, p. 9).

One of these structures is the church, uncovered by archaeological excavations in the

city of Barda – this is the historical site of Partav, an early medieval capital of Albania (Göyüşov 1971). The interior of the church is divided by pairs of columns into aisles. Every aisle had its own apse. The entrance to the middle aisle (nave) was on the western wall. The length of the church reached 11 m, width – 6 m. In comparison with the middle one, the side aisles are narrow, the width of each are 1.52 m. The foundation of the church was composed of river stones. The fabric of the walls were mostly made from square fired bricks (22×22×5 cm). The walls are intact to the height of 1.50 m. The floor and the altar were also paved with fired bricks. Among the many archaeological materials there are simple (undecorated and unglazed) ceramics. It was determined that the church ceased to exist as a result of a fire (Göyüşov 1984, p. 88). The presence of ash layer (thickness 0.20 m) within the area of the church supports this interpretation (Göyüşov 1971, p. 227). Considering the presence of square fired bricks and the predominance of simple ceramics, then this religious structure can be dated back to the 9th century. Certainly, this church is somewhat too small of scale for a capital city. The *History of Albanians* testifies to the existence of larger churches within Partav. In particular, this source mentions the "great church of St. Gregory in Partav" in connection with the events of 712 (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 16). The Barda basilica, identified by archaeological excavations, belongs to the time when Partav was neither the capital of the Albanian state, nor the central residence of the Albanian church. Thus, we can assume that the main (and most monumental) churches of Barda (Partav) have not yet been discovered.

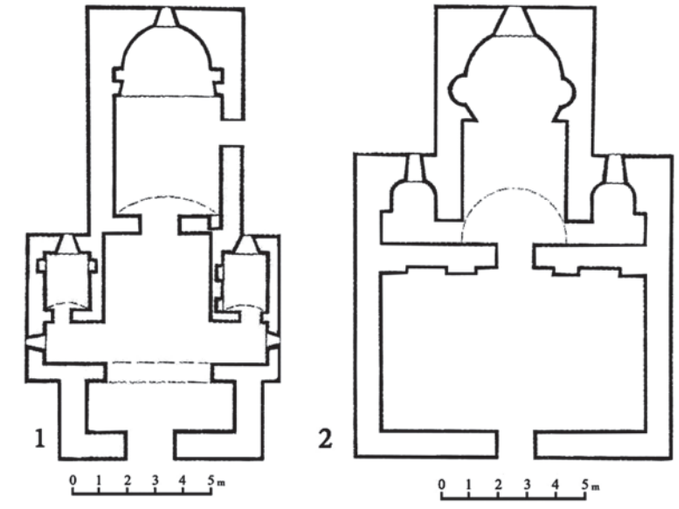

Fig. 16. Churches of Gozlu (Vaguas). Plan (S. Mkrtychyan)

The *History of the Albanians* contains information about two churches, built respectively in the 4th and 6th centuries in the historical Albanian town of Amaras where, beginning in the 6th century, a monastery was established

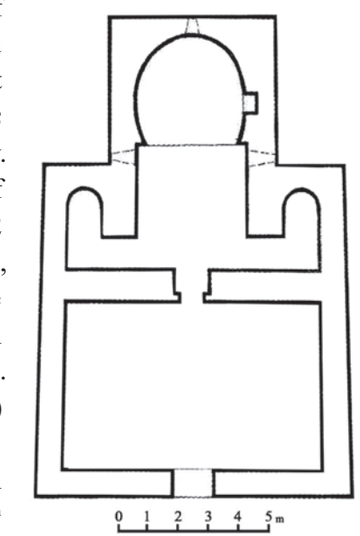

Fig. 17. The church of Airivank. Plan (G. G. Mamedova)

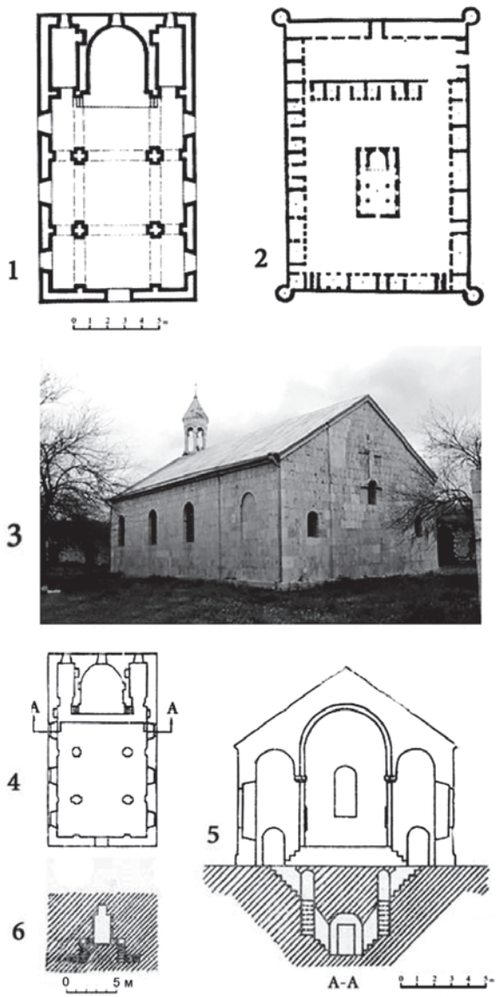

Fig. 18. Church and monastery of Amaras. 1. Plan of the church (G. G. Mamedova); 2. Plan of the monastery (G. G. Mamedova); 3. Photograph of the Church; 4. Plan (R. B. Göyüşov); 5 and 6. Elevation Cutaways of the Martyrium of St. Grigoris

(*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: pp. 14, 20, 21, 23). Currently, only one of the mentioned churches has survived – the one belonging to the 4th century. This religious building was surrounded by defensive walls (Fig. 18.*1–4*). The location of the Christian church in the citadel is one characteristic phenomenon for Caucasian Albania (Khalilov 2011, p. 117). Judging by the analysis of the *History of the Albanians*, it is the church of St. Grigoris, built by the king of Albania, Vachagan III, over the Martyrium of St. Grigoris at the beginning of the 6th century (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 23; Khalilov 2011, pp. 119–121). The Amaras church has a rectangular shape. Two different sizes of this building appear in the scientific literature: 15.9×11 m (Göyüşov 1975, p. 57; Mamedova 2004, p. 52) and 23×13.33 m (Göyüşov 1984, p. 89; Losev 1988, p. 109). Apparently, this contrasting data refers to the interior and exterior, respectively. The interior is divided into aisles by two rows of columns (with two columns in each colonnade). The side aisles extend toward the pastophoria, and the wider nave leads to a circular apse, and it does not go beyond the eastern wall. The altar's apse rises above the church floor by 1.20 m. The pastophoria have the same length (4.7 m) and width (2.1 m). Archaeological excavations were carried out along the eastern wall of this church, located near the village of Sos (Nagorno-Karabakh). It turned out that the Amaras monument preserves three construction phases: 1) early 6th century; 2) the end of the 10th century; and 3) the 1850s. Restoration works were carried out four years ago. Two different dates of the third phase were recorded in the literature – 1852 (Yampolsky 1961, p. 232) and 1858 (Mamedova 2004, p. 52). The date of the second phase was determined according to the results of archaeological studies of the foundation of the church during which there was revealed a stratigraphic

layer (thickness 0.25–0.30 m) consisting of stones, sand, and lime, used in the restoration process.

Fragments of glazed ceramics discovered there, as well as two coins of an Arabic mint from the end of the 9th century, made it possible to date this layer to the 10th century. This is also confirmed by a stone with the inscription that the church was reconstructed in the year 997/8 that was reused in the masonry of walls of the 19th century structure (Göyüşov 1975, pp. 44–45).

Two Mingachevir churches can also be attributed to the second type. The *Mingachevir Church* has an elongated rectangular shape (Fig. 11.5). The semicircular apse extends beyond the eastern wall. The length of this building is 12.40 m the width is 5.40 m, and its wall thickness is 1.30 m, and the apse's diameter is 2.50 m. The bema rises above the church floor to a height of 80 cm (Vahidov 1954, p. 133). In the interior of the church has two rows of round bases for columns (two in each colonnade) and were placed symmetrically. These bases are made of stone rubble. It is assumed that they supported wooden columns (Vahidov 1961, p. 98). Based on this, researchers attribute this monument to the three-aisled type (Vahidov 1954, p. 132; Trever, 1959. P. 299; Mamedova 2004, p. 36). At the northeast, a utility room (4.25×4.05 m), which is considered as earlier than the aisles was later attached to this religious building (Mammadova 2004, p. 36; Vahidov 1961, p. 98). A vessel, buried up to its neck in the floor of the room, indicates that this room had an utilitarian purpose. The church, utility room, as well as a wide (500 m²) open area to the north of the church, were surrounded by a wall (thickness 0.90 m) built of mudbrick. Among the finds in the church, there were decorative stones used to adorn door and window frames consisting of vegetal (five-petal lily), geometric (concentric circles, spirals), and architectural (small scale columns and arcading) motifs, carved as bas reliefs. There was also a unique rectangular stone with a hole; its height is 40.50 cm, the size of the upper part is 78×69 cm, the lower part is 67×62 cm (Göyüşov 1984, p. 124). Traces of wood are extant in the round hole (Vahidov 1961, p. 109). There is an undeciphered inscription carved in Albanian letters on the top of the four sides of the stone. Below on the front side there is a relief image of the "Tree of Life", and on the left and right sides there are two peacocks facing each other (Fig. 10). Researchers have not come to a single opinion about the purpose of this stone. It is considered to be a capital (of a pilaster) by some (Trever 1959, p. 300; Useinov et al. 1963, p. 36; Bretanitsky and Weimarn 1976, pp. 31–33); alternatively, a base of a column (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 97); a section of a pier (Qazıyev 1948, p. 399) or a pedestal (Göyüşov 1984, p. 124). Most experts agree, however, that this stone was a pedestal for affixing a processional cross (Vahidov 1961, pp. 109–110; Vahidov 1954, p. 133; Shanidze 1957, p. 38; Melikset-Beck 1957, p. 66; Chubinashvili 1957, pp. 212, 220; Abramyan 1964, p. 40; Akhundov 1986, p. 251; Mamedova 2004, p. 36). This stone also has a certain value for establishing the chronology of the Mingachevir church. R. M. Vahidov dated this religious building to the second half of the 5th – early 6th century while G. N. Chubinashvili

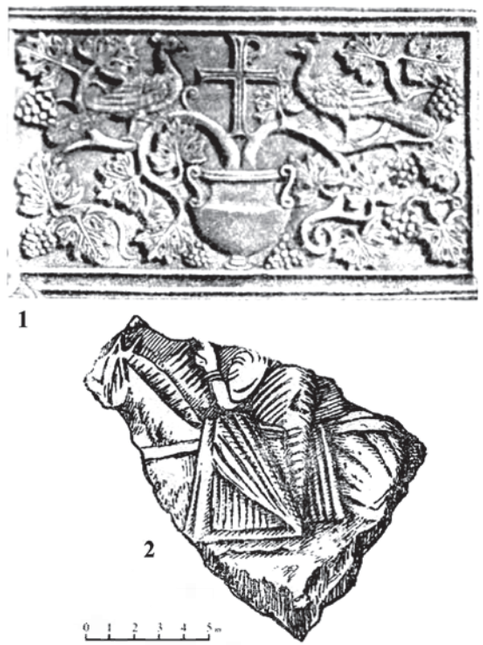

Fig. 19. 1. Image of a pair of peacocks from the Church of Sant Apollinare Nuovo (VI century, Ravenna, Italy); 2. Stone Fragment depicting St. George the Victorious, from Mingachevir

attributed the stone with the inscription and the relief image to the 8th–9th and even 10th century without taking into account the fact that from the 8th century Albanian writing began to go out of use (Vahidov 1961, p. 127; Chubinashvili 1957, p. 221). The composition depicting two peacocks facing each other is recorded in the earlier Christian monuments, particularly in the church of Sant-Apollinare Nuovo (6th century, city of Ravenna, Italy) (Fig. 19.*1*). Based on this, the dating of R. M. Vahidov is more agreeable.

The Mingachevir Church III has an elongated rectangular shape (Fig. 11.*6*). Half of its semi-circular apse extends beyond eastern walls. The length of the church reaches 19.50 m, while its width is 5.70 m, and its wall thickness is 2.05 m. It is possible that such thick walls were built to support a heavy stone vault (Mammadova 2004, p. 37). In the interior of the church at the distance of 0.70 m from the northern and southern walls there are flat stones with a plain and smooth surface symmetrically placed in two rows (four in each row). These stone bases could hold wooden columns with a diameter of 0.50–0.60 m which, apparently, divided the interior into three aisles. The Mingachevir Church III is dated to the second half of the 6th – early 7th century (Vahidov 1961, pp. 99, 126).

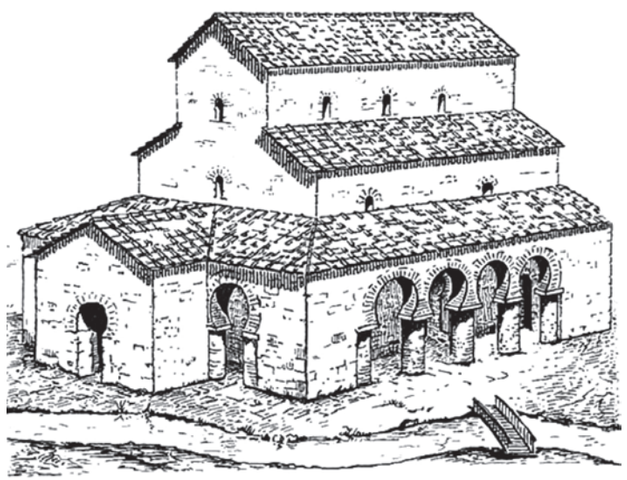

Fig. 20. Church of Gum. Reconstruction (L. S. Britanitsky and B. V. Weimarn)

The largest Albanian three-aisled basilica was investigated in the village of *Gum* (Gakh District) (Fig. 20). The width of this structure is 19.30 m, and the length according to some authors

is 36.50 m (Useinov et al. 1963, p. 29; Bretanitsky and Weimarn 1976, p. 26; Göyüşov 1984, p. 93; Akhundov 1986.P. 222; Mamedova 2004, p. 50); however, others provide this measurement 26.50 m (Baranovsky 1947, p. 30; Trever 1959, p. 298; Karakhmedova 1986, p. 9; Mammadzade 1978, p. 30). Most likely, this discrepancy should be associated with two phases in the plan of the building. In one of them (Fig. 21.*1–2*) there is additional entrance in front of the western wall, which is absent in the second version (Fig. 21.*3*). The western side of the Gum church has a quadrangular shape; the eastern part ends with three apses extending beyond the wall. The side apses have a semicircular shape, and the middle one is horseshoe shaped. A pair of pilasters in the western and eastern walls and two pairs of T-shaped piers divide the interior into three aisles. The middle aisle (nave), compared to the side one, is wider and higher. Its roof does not survive. Rough stones were used to vault the side aisles. At the eastern end, the side aisles lead to pastophoria. The pastophoria do not have a direct connection with the apse and central altar; in other words, in order to access the bema, one had to exit the passage in the western part of the pastophorion and re-enter the apse area. Outside from the northeast and southeast, rectangular rooms were attached to the church, ending at their eastern end with semi-circular apses. The purpose of these two rooms were not specified by the researchers.

From these rooms, through the western entrance, it was possible to access the porch that surrounded the church at the northern, western, and southern sides. Only a few bases of the porch columns have survived. On the western side, the middle column, judging by the location of its base, which stood against the entrance to the hall, obscured the view of the interior from the outside. Two other entrances into the hall, from the side of the porch, were on the northern and southern walls

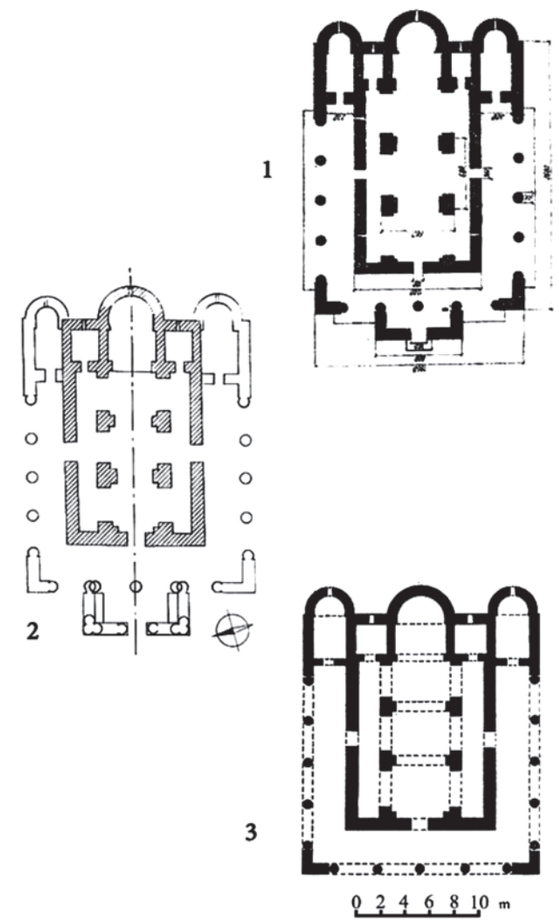

Fig. 21. Church of Gum. 1. Plan (D. A. Akhundov); 2. Plan (L. S. Britanitsky and B. V. Weimarn); 3. Plan (K. V. Trever)

of the church. For the construction of the church, bluish and dark green river stones were used as the main building material. The clay mortar served as the main cohesive material. The placement of stones in alternating colors gave the church a distinctive and attractive appearance. In the erection and cladding of the foundations of the church, the builders also used the square fired bricks (23×23 cm). The Gum Church was dated differently by researchers; for example, the 5th century (Jacobson 1970, p. 47; Akhundov 1986, p. 223; Karakhmedova 1986, p. 9); 5th–6th centuries (Bretanitsky and Weimarn 1976, pp. 26, 28); 6th century (Baranovsky 1947, pp. 29, 31; Useinov et al. 1963, p. 31; Göyüşov 1984, p. 94; Gajiyeva 2001); and the 8th–9th centuries (Mamedova 2004, p. 50). The last-mentioned opinion, belonging to G. N. Chubinashvili, was based on the fact that in the architectural monuments of Kakhetiya, dating back to the 8th–9th centuries, there is the same combination stone masonry and brick – just as in the Gum Church. Determining the chronology of the Gum monument, however, the researchers did not take into account a particularly important circumstance – the square fired bricks of small sizes entered the building practice from the 9th century. The use of this building material in the construction of foundations of this church completely excludes the possibility of considering fired bricks as a material used later in repair and restoration work. Based on this information, this religious structure should be dated to the 9th century.

Another basilica was revealed in the village of Shykhly (Agdash District) within the early medieval settlement. This church has a rectangular shape. Its length reaches 11 m and wall thickness is 0.98 m. Two pairs of rectangular piers divided its interior into three aisles. The width of the middle aisle (nave) is 4 m, the width of side aisles are 2 m. The middle aisle (nave) ends at the eastern side of the church with a semi-circular apse. The side aisles are adjacent to the rectangular pastophoria located on both sides of the apse. The church has an earthen floor. The entrance's width located on the western side measures 1.18 m. The foundation of this structure is composed of river stones. Builders used mud bricks in the construction of the walls. Based on fragments of ceramic vessels found in the interior, and also considering similar monuments, R. B. Göyüşov dated the church in the village of Shykhly to the 6th–7th centuries (Göyüşov 1984, p. 88).

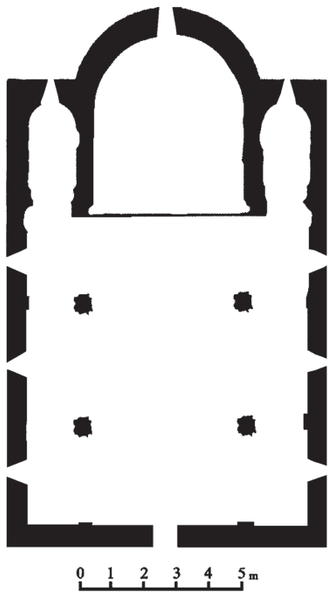

Fig. 22. Tezekend Church. Layout (R. B. Göyüşov)

During archaeological excavations, there was discovered a basilica in the Karabakh steppe, near the village of *Tezekend* (Agjabadi District). The church has a rectangular shape (Fig. 22). The length of this structure is 16.50 m and its width is 9.20 cm. The apse horseshoe-

shaped and extends beyond the eastern wall. Two pairs of columns divide the interior into three aisles. The distance between the columns is 2 m. The middle aisle (nave) is 5 m wide, each of the side aisles are 2.10 m. The nave ends with an large apse. The side aisles lead to the rectangular pastophoria located on the northern and southern sides of the bema. The pastophoria have semicircular apses, which, unlike the central apse, do not go beyond the eastern wall. Archaeological excavations measured the bema at 45 cm from the floor of the church. The entrance was in the western wall. The floor of the building is paved with fired bricks. In the construction of this facility, there were used roughly hewn ashlars, river stones, and, in some places, fired bricks (35×39×6 cm and 34×36×9 cm). The columns were made of river stones. Considering the ceramics found in the process of archaeological research, as well as similar monuments of the South Caucasus, the researchers attributed this building to the 6th century (Göyüşov 1984, pp. 87–88; Gajiyeva 2001; Mamedova 2004, p. 59). It can be added that the height of the apse is characteristic of the Diophysite churches of Albania. Part of the steppe, where this building was located from the 40–50s of the 7th century, was under the control of the Arabs. Based on this, the Tezekend Church can be dated to the second half of the 6th – early 7th century.

The three-aisled church was discovered in the medieval settlement of Sarai Galasy ("palace fortress"), located in the territory of the village of *Tatlı* (Agstafa District). This settlement was surrounded by ramparts. Tiles (measuring 38×24–29 cm) were found there in the church, which apparently covered the roof of this building (Göyüşov and Nuriyev 1978, p. 43). Apart from the tiles in the corresponding cultural layer, where the ruins of the church were located, there were also found glazed ceramics, metal items, as well as a gold coin minted on behalf of the Byzantine emperor Constantine X Dukas (1059–1067). Given these archaeological materials, this cultural layer of the settlement and the church can be dated to the 10th–11th centuries.

The three-aisled basilicas of Agoglanchai (Figs. 23, 24; photo 19), Yeni Zod, Askipara-I and others have not yet been studied archaeologically.

The cruciform layout churches, which forms the **third type** of the classification, according to researchers, have arisen on the basis of Christian martyria in the form of a cross (Mamedova 2004, p. 41).

The cruciform martyria, vaulted by a dome, were widespread in Asia Minor in the 5th century (Jacobson 1985, p. 26).

One of such church was found on the top (1000 m) of *Beshikdag* mountain (Agdam District). There are carved zigzagging steps into the rock for climbing up to the church (Fig. 25). The church is surrounded by a megalithic round wall (diameter 20 m). Taking into account this fact, there is an assumption that this Christian structure was erected on the site of an ancient pagan sanctuary (Yampolsky 1960, p. 248). The length of the church was10 m in length east to west, and eight meters in width, and 0.70–0.80 m in wall thickness. Archaeologists attributed this monument to the type known as the "cross-domed church"

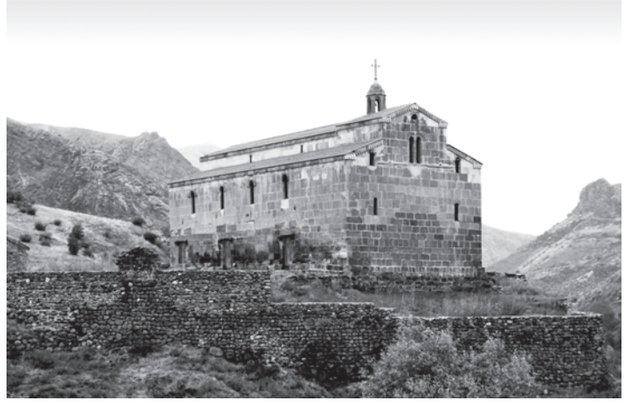

Fig. 23. Church of Agoglan

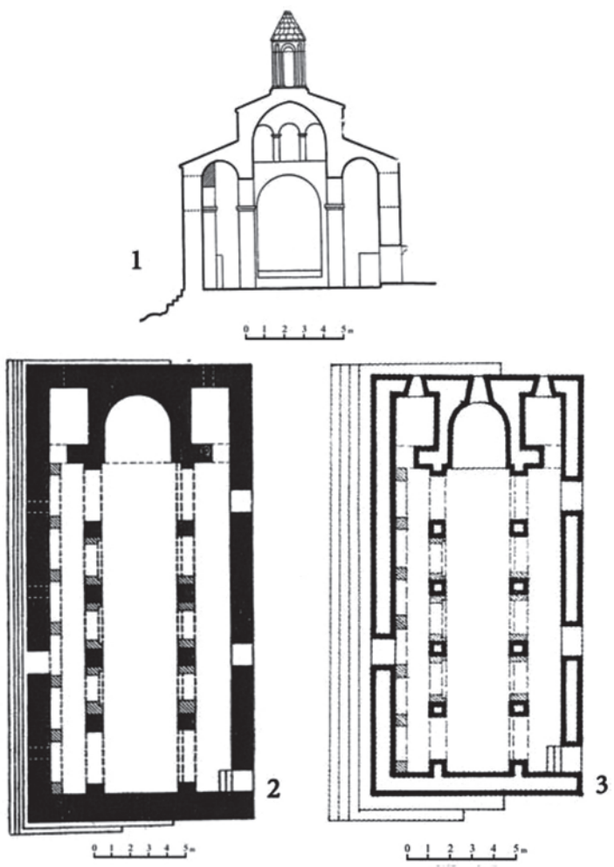

Fig. 24. Church of Agoglan. 1. Elevation; 2. Plan (M. Useinov, L. Bretanitsky, A. Salamzade); 3. Plan (G. G. Mamedova)

(Göyüşov et al. 1974, p. 42). It is supposed that entrances were located at each transept arm of the cruciform plan (Yampolsky 1960, p. 248. Fig. 4). Considering the steep nature of the relief of the location of the structure at the eastern transept arm, however, it should be argued that the church had only three entrances: at the north, south and west walls. In the eastern area there was a semi-circular apse. The church is built of well-hewn rectangular stone blocks, on the surface of which there are 35 different carved signs. According to the Georgian researcher A. Shanidze, a participant in the expedition that studied this monument, Beshikdag signs differ from Georgian and Armenian letters (Yampolsky 1960, p. 250). Analogues of one group of these signs are revealed in the church erected in Sisian (historical region of Suni / Sisakan) in the 6th–7th centuries (Yampolsky 1960, Fig. 6). Similar signs are also found on the cross stone found near the Beshikdag church. It is believed that they were not masonry marks, but contained epigraphic information (Yampolsky 1960, p. 250). Considering similar monuments, as well as signs that have not yet been deciphered, the construction of the Beshikdag church was attributed to the 6th–7th centuries

(Yampolsky 1960, p. 249; Mamedova 2004, p. 80). Similarly judging by the inscription, a church built in the shape of a cross and covered with a dome, was erected within the *Dashkesan* District in the year 989 and had dimensions of 11×10.25 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 118).

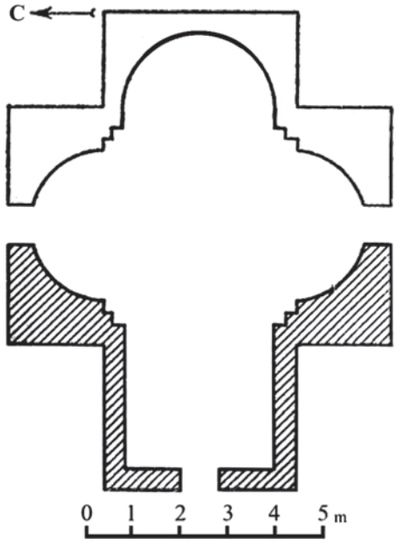

Fig. 25. Church of Beshikdag. Z. I. Yampolsky's plan corrected by M. J. Khalilov

The *Pir Javanshir* Church is located in the Gadabay region. The walls of this structure were made of square well-hewn ashlar blocks. The entrance to the church was located at the western transept arm of the cruciform plan. The pastophoria with apses were placed on the northern and southern transept arms of the plan. A horseshoe-shaped apse was located in the eastern transept arm. Large vessels were embedded inside the vaulting (Göyüşov 1984, p. 95). It is believed that these vessels served as a kind of acoustic amplifier [or resonators] (Göyüşov 1984, p. 95). For comparison, it can be noted that in the construction of the dome of the church of San Vitale (547, Ravenna, Italy) it also had conical-shaped fragments of ceramic vessels; alternatively; according to some researchers, in such a way, builders could relieve weight exerted by the dome (Jacobson 1985, p. 32). Ceramic vessel in the vaulting, however, could simultaneously improve acoustics. The name of the Albanian church is "The Sanctuary of Javanshir". It can be assumed that this religious building was somehow connected with the Grand Duke of Albania, Javanshir, who was involved in the construction of Christian churches in the country (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: pp. 22, 24). Since there is an opinion that the cruciform plan churches were especially popular in the 7th century (Mamedova 2004, p. 97), then Pir Javanshir could be supposedly dated to the middle of the 7th century.

Among the churches of the third type, comparatively extensive archaeological research was carried out in the structure located on the outskirts of the village of Orta Zeizid (Shaki District). This church (Fig. 26) towered over a hill (Kerimov 2008, p. 18). With the exception of the eastern transept, all other sides of the cruciform plan has a rectangular shape. A semi-circular apse is located at the eastern end. The foundation of the church is composed of carved stones of bluish and dark gray hue. The building's dimensions are 1.20 in width and 0.30 m in height. The thickness of the main parts of the walls of the church are 0.80 m. The church is plastered with clay mortar. The floor of this structure has a thickness of 3.3–5.0 cm (Kerimov 2008, p. 14–15). In some places of the church upon its surface, where there was a double layer of plaster, there was also extant traces of frescoes (Karimov 2008, p. 14). A. A. Karakhmedova attributed the images to the late Middle Ages and, based on this, came

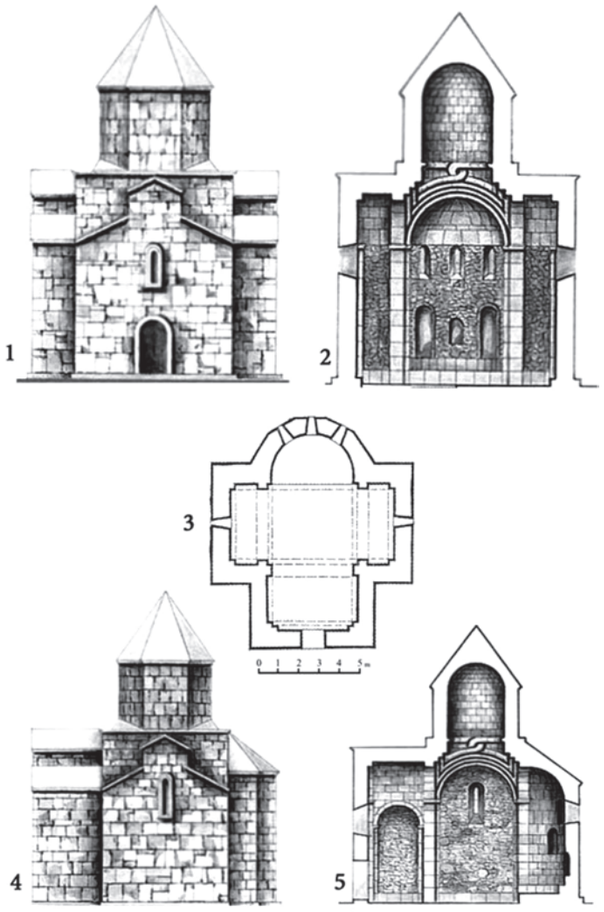

Fig. 26. Church of Orta Zeizid.1. Exterior west elevation; 2. Interior cutaway elevation looking east; 3. Ground plan; 4. Exterior elevation looking north; 5. Interior cutaway elevation looking north (V. I. Kerimov)

the conclusion that this religious building was repeatedly restored over the centuries (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 20). The church had a tiled roof. The size of the tiles (34–36×47–49 cm) allows scholars to attribute them to the era of the early Middle Ages (Khalilov 2010, p. 186). Archaeological research in the north, northwest, and southwest of the church recorded three auxiliary structures (Kerimov 2008, pp. 19–20). Researchers believe that in the early Middle Ages functioned only the church, and other buildings and defensive walls were built in the 9th–11th centuries, after which the process of establishment of the monastery complex was completed in Orta Zeizid (Kerimov 2008, p. 65). The samples of ceramics identified by archaeological excavations, were classified by V. I. Karimov into two separate chronological groups: the 2nd–6th centuries and 8th–13th centuries (Kerimov 2008, p. 17). In his opinion, the church was built during one construction period (Karimov 2008, p. 16). Early medieval tiles and the complete absence of fired bricks among building materials also led to this conclusion; however, archaeologists who explored this monument have not reached agreement on the issue of dating. V. I. Kerimov believes that the church was built in the 5th–6th centuries whereas A. A. Karakhmedova places this religious building in the 6th–7th centuries (Kerimov 2008, pp. 26, 31; Karakhmedova 1986, p. 21).

Architects assume that it is a later monument, that is, 9th–10th centuries or 10th or 10th–11th centuries (Gajiyeva 2001; Mamedova 2004, pp. 97–98, respectively). Admittedly, archaeological research here would be crucial in clarifying this issue. Giving preference to the opinion of A. A. Karakhmedova, it can be additionally noted that, judging by the

sherds of ceramics, this church continued to function as part of the monastery complex until the 13th century.

Another monument of this type is the church, located north of the village of *Gebizdere* (Zagatala District) (Fig. 27). The length of the premise is 7.70 m and its width is 6 m. Flat river stones were used in the construction of the walls, just above the base. In the masonry of the walls, there is an alternation of the rows of vertically (headers) and horizontally (stretchers)placed courses. The base of the walls is lined with rectangular bricks (40×21–23×5 cm: 36×23×5 cm). In place of the eastern transept arm of the cruciform plan there is semi-circular apse (inside), while polygonal on the outside. According to A. A. Karakhmedova, the apse was separated by curtain, as indicated by the holes on the sides of the wall in front of the altar (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 26). The cornice of the church consists of five rows of bricks. The square fired bricks (21×21×5 cm) were used in the vaulting. G. G. Mamedova dated this church to the 8th–9th centuries (Mamedova 2004, p. 97). The use of rectangular and square fired bricks in the construction of this building confirms this conclusion.

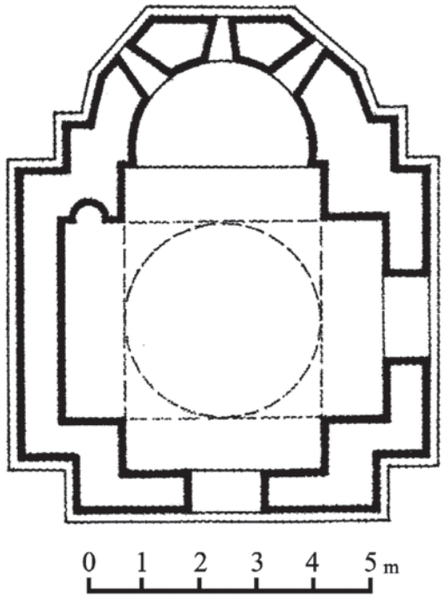

Fig. 27. Church of Gebizdere. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova)

We noted above that the cruciform-plan churches arose based on martyria plans, which were memorials of the holy martyrs, whose tombs were also part of the complexes. Perhaps given this fact, A. A. Karakhmedova, who studied the church built of river stones in the village of Pipan (Zagatala District), concluded that this monument (Fig. 28) was a mausoleum in its primary functional purpose (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 21). But a number of elements indicate that it was a cruciform church initially. The entrance of this building was in the western transept arm of the cruciform plan, and

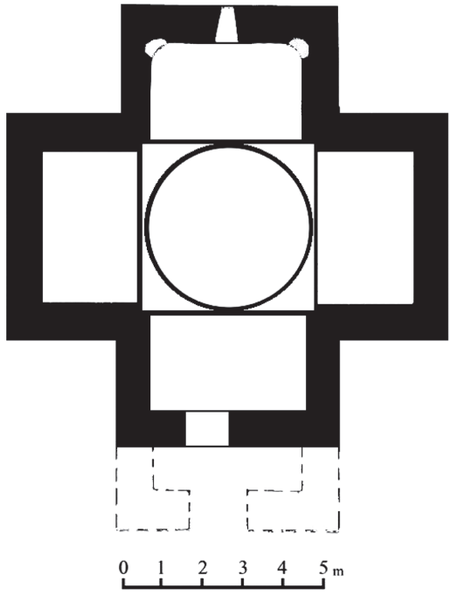

Fig. 28. Pipan Church. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova)

in the east end there was a rectangular bema, which corresponded to the building standards of Christian churches. The tomb in the interior of this building was not found. Clay vessels were placed within the masonry in the corners of the walls of the cruciform plan which, of course, could not be used as structural supports, being light material. Unlike the Pir Javanshir church, in this case, it is an undeniable fact that they created a simple acoustics system to amplify the voice of the priest who read the scriptures. The Pipan Church, after comparing it with similar monuments, was dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 23). Unlike the Pipan Church, there are a number of other Albanian Christian cruciform churches (Gadabay, Askipara II, and others), that were not thoroughly studied by archaeological methods.

The Christian round churches (the **fourth type** of Albanian church) developed based domed architectural systems of Late Antiquity. The revolution of dome architecture, which began in the 5th century, progressed rapidly continued in the 6th century (Jacobson 1985, p. 23). The dome system was based on a theoretical design, which began to take shape in the Christian world from the beginning of the 320s. With the emergence of the dome system, the place of the liturgy was moved from the apse, located on the eastern side, towards the central part of the nave of the church, where the ambo was placed under the dome – a symbol of the heavens (Jacobson 1985, p. 11, 24, 54–55).[1] According to the *History of the Albanians*, the first Albanian chapel with an ambo was built by St. Grigoris in 337 in Tsri – the city of Albania (*History of Aghvans*, 1861, I: p. 19). The ambo indicates that the church in Tsri, apparently, was a domed building round in plan. In addition, the *History of the Albanians* reported on a domed church built by Albanians with stone and brick no later than the 530s (*History of Aghvans*, 1861, I: p. 27; II: p. 33). All this historical information indicate that Albania was on a par with Christian countries that took the first steps in this direction of architecture.

One of the well-studied round churches of Albania is in the village of *Lekit* (Gakh region). It is believed that this church was a three-tier structure (Fig. 29). The vast majority of published scientific papers indicate that the diameter of this building was 22 m (Baranovsky 1947, p. 32; Trever 1959, p. 303; Useinov et al. 1963, p. 31; Britanitsy, Weimarn 1976, p. 28; Göyüşov 1984, p. 96; Karakhmedova 1986. P. 9; Mamamadzade 1978, p. 30). Only G. G. Mamedova, who completed new measurements, noted that the diameter of this structure is 18.80 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 71). According to G. G. Mamedova, the diameter of the dome of the church was 7 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 162). Four rectangular piers formed a square in the center of the interior of this religious building, covered by a domed. The length of each side

[1] Editor's Note: In the Byzantine Empire, according to textual sources St. John Chrysostom was the first churchman to speak on an ambo, built specifically for the first phase of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople during the late 4th century (Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IX.ii). While domed architecture in the Anatolia and Caucasus were being developed during the fifth century, the "standardization" of domed plans, as described in this section, however, only began in earnest after sixth century (Krautheimer 1986, 238-300).

of the square is 8.58 m, the length of each side of the square piers is 1.75 m (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 228). Eight round columns surrounded the piers, in the form of a circle corresponding to the wall. Eight additional columns were placed between the piers and the other columns as a means of transitioning between the circular base and octagonal middle tier that supported the corresponding semi-domes of the tetraconch (Mammadzade 1978, p. 30). In other words, the tetraconch vaulting and the dome rested on 12 columns with a diameter of 0.9–1.0 m; then between the wall and the piers there was a round column supporting the gallery level – so there were 16 columns total (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 228). The walls of the gallery were as round in plan as the walls of the ground level. The columns that stood at the ground level (1.0×1.0×0.55 m), identified by archaeological excavations, still have a height of 2.45 m in 1959, and the wall is 1.35–1.40 m thick and still rise to a height of 7.20 m (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 228–229).The width of the corridor between the walls and columns at the narrowest point is 1.68 m. In this round corridor at a depth of 0.25 m archaeological excavations revealed 10 cm thick carved stone slabs, which paved the floor of the church. The same stone slabs were found in the central part of this structure. In the interior of the church, the cultural layer was traced to a depth of 0.90 m (Kerimov et al. 2008, p. 87–88). According to G. G. Mamedova, the function of the bema was performed within the eastern semi-dome (Mamedova 2004, p. 69). Apparently, however as in other round churches, the liturgy was performed in the central domed part of the interior. The church had three entrances: from the western, southern, and northern sides. The northern and southern entrances had a width of 1.58 m. The lower part of the portal survived in these entrances. The archaeological excavations conducted outside

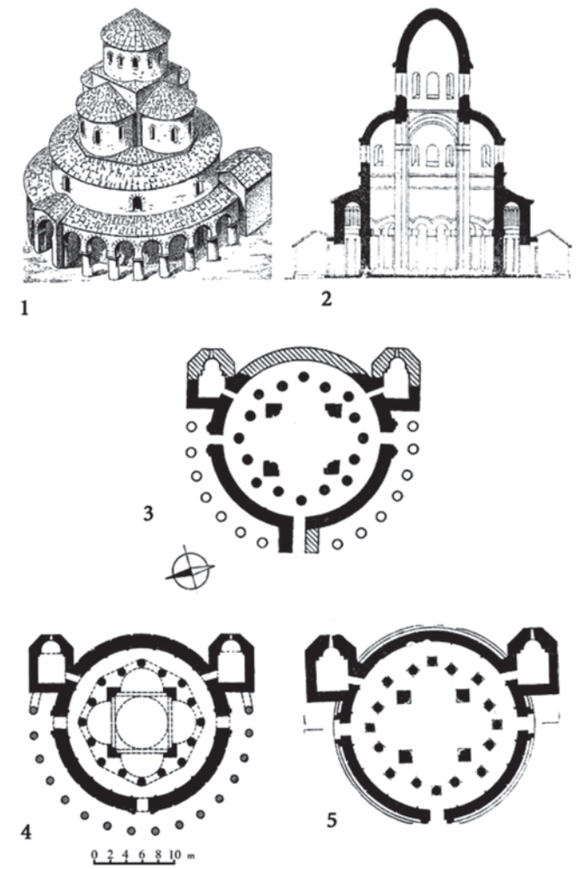

Fig. 29. Lekit Church: 1. Reconstructions (L. S. Britanitsky and B. V. Weimarn); 2. Elevation Cutaway (D. A. Akhundov); 3. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova); 4. Plan (M. Useinov, L. Bretanitsky, and A. Salamzade); 5. Plan (D. A. Akhundov)

the western entrance (1.65 m wide) at a depth of 0.50 revealed bases of columns with a diameter of 0.85–0.90 m which, possibly, were gallery elements between the pastophoria and the western entrance (Kerimov et al. 2008, p. 88). D. A. Akhundov drew attention to the fact that the number of columns supporting each semi-dome was odd; in front of each entrance there is respectively a column that blocks the access from the interior to the outside (Akhundov 1986, p. 211; Akhundov 1986a, p. 141). He considered this phenomenon as an influence of pagan idolatry and argued that the Lekit church began originally as a pagan religious building, and completed as a Christian sanctuary (Akhundov 1986, pp. 211–212). G. G. Mamedova notes that in the odd number of columns supporting the concha, the Lekit church differs from the similar structures of Byzantium and the South Caucasus; however, this is connected not with an ideological factor, but with constructive reasons (Mamedova 2004, p. 71). There were pastophoria adjoining the church: one from the northeast and another from the southeast side. Each of them had one entrance (width – 1.15 m) providing access into the church. On the outer surface of the walls of the lower tier, at the same distance from each other, there were pilasters, on the surface of which there are vertical grooves. According to the calculations of G. G. Mamedova, the pilasters divide the outer surface of the wall into 28 uniform sections, and along the walls facing the interior, there are 20 half-columns having a semicircular shape in section. The distance between them is 3 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 71). According to L. G. Ishkhanov, the distance between these half-columns have a diameter of 12 cm, a height of 3 m, and support a capital in the shape of a prism is 2.80–2.85 m (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 230). Upwards, at a distance of 4.5 m from the ground surface, there was found a second row of half-columns located at intervals of 0.95–1.0 m from each other (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 230). The research on the territory of the church, discovered double columns that have a common capital. A symbol resembling one of the Albanian letters is carved on the surface of one pair. It is believed that this is the mark of a stonecutter (Ishkhanov 1970, p. 230. Fig. 5 on p. 232). In the construction of the walls of the church, there were used roughly carved river stones. In the process of wall construction with the same type of stone, their size was taken into account: each row consists of stones of the same height, as a result of which the rows differ in their height. In this way, the builders ensured the stability of monument. Grayish-green and grayish-blue facing stones provided its walls an attractive aesthetic. The alternation of stone rows, varying in color and height, was characteristic of the medieval Arran architectural school, as well as Shirvan-Absheron architectural monuments (Useinov et al., 1963, p. 204; Avalov 2008, p. 248; Dostiyev 2009, p. 253). Such important supporting details as pylons and columns are made of high-quality square fired-bricks (26×26×6.5 cm, 32×32×8 cm). Limestone was used in the construction of entrance portals, the half columns, and pilasters. The lime mortar had an admixture of fine gravel and sand that was used as a cohesive material (Useinov et al. 1963, p. 32; Ishkhanov 1970, p. 230–231). The researchers dated this church in different ways – within the 2nd and 8 th centuries (Khalilov 2011, p. 150). It was even suggested that

this religious building is a monument of the 8th–9th centuries, being characteristic of Kakheti architecture (Akhundov 1986, p. 213). A. L. Jacobson made an adjustment to this idea and noted that this structure is a monument of Albania, and not Kakheti (Jacobson 1970, p. 47). Considering the fact that the foundations of this building were erected from square fired bricks, this Albanian church can be dated to the 8th–9th centuries.

The church on the Kilsedag mountain (Gabala region), revealed during archaeological excavations, is a monument of the fourth type (Figs. 30 and 31). A plot of land (0.5 hectares) around the church is surrounded by a wall, the thickness of which reaches 2 m. The excavations here revealed the remains of several types of buildings erected from large and medium sized river stones. The Kilsedag church, similar to rotundas, rises on a two-step platform, and each step has the same width and height (0.30 m). From the northeast and southeast, there are pastophoria round in plan, attached to the church, of which its interior diameter reached 2.30 m and had a wall thickness 1 m. On the outer wall of each pastophorion, on the second step of the platform, there are four engaged columns that have decorative value, and the total width of each is 0.17 m. Each pastophorion has one entrance to the interior of the church. The church itself had three entrances: from the western, northern and southern sides. A pair of parallel protrusions of 1.30 m long and one meter wide were constructed on both sides of each entrance, at the end of which one base of columns was placed (Akhundov 1986, p. 204, Fig. 219–219a). It is believed that these are the remains of a portal with columns.

Fig. 30. Kilsedag Church. Archaeological Site

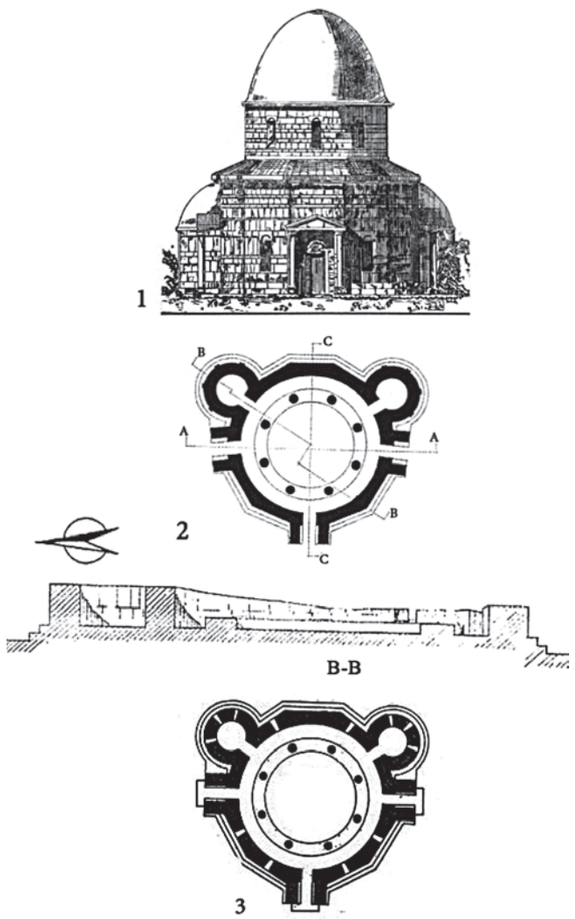

Fig. 31. Kilsedag Church. 1. Reconstruction (D. A. Akhundov); 2. Plan; (K. M. Mamedzade); 3. Plan (D. A. Akhundov)

The diameter of the interior of the church is 9.40 m (Vahidov and Kuliyev 1972, p. 20) or 10.40 m (Vahidov and Guliyev 1972, p. 31; Vahidov et al. 1972, p. 487), the thickness of the outer wall is 0.90–1.15 m. This wall has 12 facets on the external side. The length of each facet is on average 3.20 m. The inner concentric "wall" (one meter thick) served as the base for columns that supported the upper drum of the church. It was found that above the foundations of the inner wall, eight round columns with a diameter of 0.80 m were installed equidistant from each other. The diameter of the area surrounded by this wall is 8.40 m. The distance between external and internal walls constitutes one meter. According to G. G. Mamedova, the diameter of the dome of this church reached 6.40 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 162). The walls of the church were composed of well-hewn porous grayish-white limestone blocks (0.60×0.80 m). A limestone mortar served as cohesive material. The fired bricks (24–27×24.5 – 26×5–6 cm) were used in the construction of columns and some of the other architectural elements. Archaeological materials found in the excavation consist of fragments of simple and early glazed ceramic vessels, architectural ceramics, and small fragments of glass, iron, and bronze items. Among the finds, there are interesting two large stone fragments, on the surface of which there are images of the cross. Architects mainly attribute this religious building to the Late Antique era (Akhundov 1986, p. 205; Akhundov 1986a, p. 141; Mamedova 2004, p. 64; Gajiyeva 2001, etc.), while referring to the fact that the arrangement of its interior (absence of the altar apse on the eastern side) is not typical for Christian churches (Akhundov 1986, p. 205; Mamedova 2004, p. 65). However, as noted above, with the emergence of Christian domed churches, the place of the liturgy in religious buildings of this type was shifted to the domed central part of the interior because

of the ambo (Jacobson 1985, p. 24). Another argument is based on the fact that, unlike other churches of the South Caucasus that are round in plan, in which the dome is built above a square foundation, the Kilsedag Church's dome rests on a round plan, characteristic for buildings of antiquity (Mamedova 2004, pp. 64–65). At the same time it should be noted that buildings with a round base along with the ancient Greek and Roman cultures were also inherent in the Christian architecture of Byzantium (Mamedova 2004, p. 64). Proceeding from this premise, the appearance of the above distinctive feature of the Kilsedag church can be considered as the result of the interconnections of Christian architecture of Byzantium and Albania. Archaeologists who unearthed this religious building, believe that it was built in the 8th century and continued to function until the 11th–12th centuries (Vahidov and Quliyev 1972, p. 21; 1972, p. 32). The presence of fired bricks of relatively small size in the construction of supporting columns confirms the chronology defined by archaeologists.

An equally significant monument of the fourth type is the church, located near the village of Mamrukh (Zagatal District) at the top of the Armatian mountain (Armatai). This religious building also has the parallel name – Perikala (Fig. 32). When the researchers first discovered this building, the apse, pastophoria, two piers in the interior and other remains, as well as part of the defensive walls surrounding it, including three round towers, were still standing, indicating a grand complex (Akhundov 1986, p. 207; Mamedova 2004, p. 65). In addition, A. A. Karakhmedova, who had been conducting archaeological research in the complex for several years, at a distance of about 60 m from the

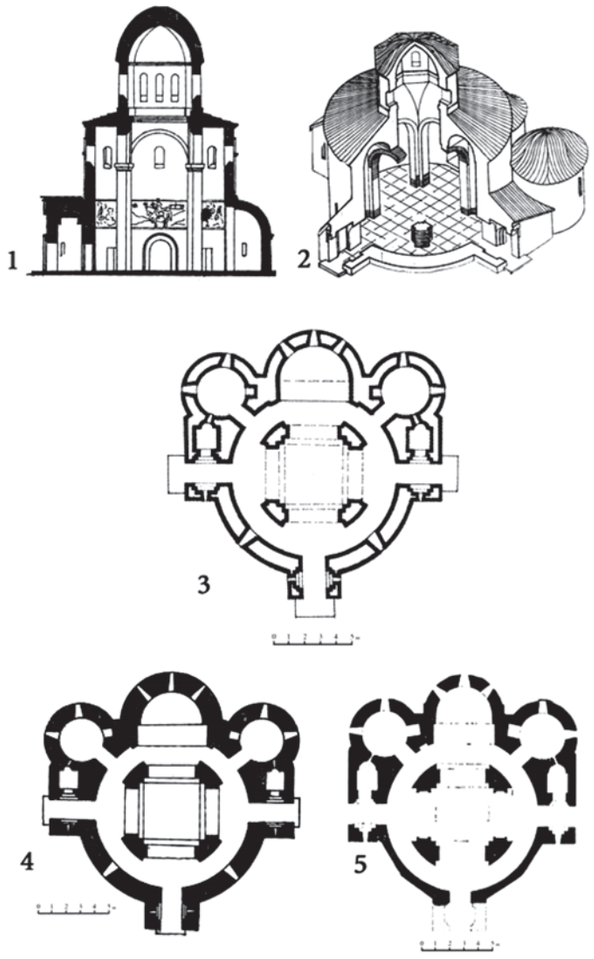

Fig. 32. Mamrukh Church. 1. Reconstructed Cutaway Elevation (D. A. Akhundov); 2. Isometric Cutaway Reconstruction (D. A. Akhundov); 3. Plan (G. G. Mamedova); 4. Plan (D. A. Akhundov); 5. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova)

defensive wall, revealed two structures for storing water, built in the form of a cone, as well as the remains of a ceramic pipes for supplying water from them (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 17). It is assumed that a monastery functioned here (Mamedova 2004, p. 65). The church had three entrances: from the west, north and south. The entrances jutted outwards in the shape of a narrow portal.

According to A. A. Karakhmedova, the southern entrance had a tiled gable roof, and the round wall of the church on the outside was octagonal (Karakhmedova 1986, pp. 17–18). On the eastern side of the main circular part of the church there is a semicircular apse (width – 3 m). On the northern and southern sides of the apse there are two pastophoria with a diameter of 3.1–3.2 m. The total diameter of the church is 18.80 m (Akhundov 1986, p. 209). The pastophoria had one entrance into its ambulatory. According to the observations of A. A. Karakhmedova, in the middle part of the ceiling of the pastophoria there was a hole with a ceramic pipe squeezed into it (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 17). It is possible that this is a part of the heating system. The apse was overlaid by a semi-dome, and the church's central area was covered by a dome. D. A. Akhundov does not exclude the possibility that the central area had a tent-like or pyramidal roof (Akhundov 1986, p. 208).

The dome was located on an octagonal drum, which, in turn, was supported by four piers in the interior. On the eastern side of the northern and southern aisles of the church, there was built one additional building, the square part of which was 1.48×1.48 m in size. The eastern area was an apse elevated 20 cm above the floor. On the adjacent wall between this area and the corresponding pastophorion there is a niche 40 cm high. According to the assumption of A. A. Karakhmedova, these premises could be designed for priests within the pastophorion to interact with parishioners who needed absolution (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 18). It is believed that the church consisted of three tiers. The ground-floor tier was where the altar and the entrances stood; the middle tier had a gallery with an ambulatory; the upper tier was where the drum and dome were located (Mamedova 2004, p. 67–68). River stones, well-hewn limestone blocks, and square bricks (23–24×23–24×5 cm) were used in the construction of the church (Mamedova 2004, p. 67). If the outer surface of the walls were laid with river stones and lined with limestone blocks, then the surface of the walls facing the interior was covered with plaster. On the surface of the plaster of the semi-domes of the apse and piers, there are traces beautiful blue and yellow colored paint decorations. The roof of the church was tiled. Architects dated this church within the 2nd–5th centuries (Akhundov 1986, pp. 208, 258; Gajiyeva 2001; Mamedova 2004, p. 69; Kerimov 2008, p. 16). Results of archaeological research, however, allowed A. A. Karakhmedova to put forward the suggestion that the Mamrukh Church was built in the 6th century and continued to function until the 13th century (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 20). Given that the arches and the drum were built of square bricks it is possible to admit the existence of another construction or restoration stage (9th century) (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 19).

The church, located near the village of *Mokhranis* (Khojavand District) (Figs. 33, 34.*1*), to some extent differs from other religious buildings of the fourth type. The exterior of the church has a diamond shape with rounded corners. In the interior, there are four semi-domes, but the one on the east side served as the bema. In such a way a tetraconch or cruciform plan structure is formed. At the corners of the crossing square between the semi-domes there are four more semi-domed niches. According to D. A. Akhundova, they were built to improve the acoustics of the hall (Akhundov 1986a, p. 141). All apses are horseshoe-shaped in plan. The outline of the exterior corresponds to the structure of the interior, representing an alternation of four long and four short arcs. The entrance to the church was on the long western arc. The diameter of the church measures 9.40 m (Akhundov 1986, p. 246). The church was erected from roughly hewn chipped stones. A limestone mortar was used as cohesive material. In appearance, the Mokhranis Church somewhat resembles the Church of the Holy Apostles (Kars, Turkey) (Kerimov 2008, Fig. 16/6), the church in Apamea (Syria) (Fig. 34.*2*), and the cathedral in Ninotsminda (Sagarejo, Georgia) (Ramishvili 2003, p. 403, Tab. 117/13). It is interesting that on the wall of the Ninotsminda Church there is an inscription in three lines, which, according to the Georgian researcher A. G. Shanidze, was carved "in the language of the people, which the Georgians called the 'kher' and who, living in the neighborhood with the Georgians on the eastern side, was part of the Albanian state entity" (Trever 1959, p. 338). K. V. Trever considered

Fig. 33. Mokhranis Church. Reconstruction (G. G. Mamedova)

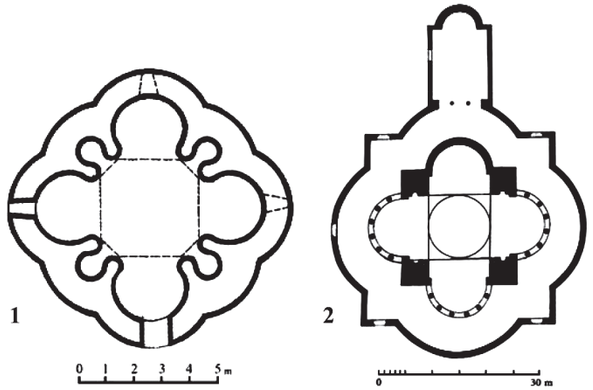

Fig. 34. Comparison. 1. Mokhranis Church Plan (G. G. Mamedova); 2. Church of Apamea (Syria), Plan (A. L. Jacobson)

this quite possible, whereas Georgian researcher D. L. Muskhelishvili associated this writing with a tribe of Suj of Albanian origin (Trever 1959, p. 338; Muskhelishvili 1982, p. 23). This epigraphic material indicates that the Albanians could also build architectural monuments of this type. Azerbaijani researchers dated the Mokhranis Church to the 6th century (Akhundov 1986, p. 246; Akhundov 1986a, p. 142; Mamedova 2004, p. 76).

Round chapels were also built in Albania. One of them, which is essentially a rotunda, was discovered by archaeologists near the settlement of Gyavurkala, in the territory of the *Papravend* village (Agdam region). The entrance to the church was on the western side. The interior was illuminated by narrow windows located on the eastern wall. There were shallow niches on the northern and eastern walls. The chapel was built of river stones. The cohesive material was lime mortar. Considering the results of archaeological research, the Papravend Chapel was dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Göyüşov 1984, p. 97).

The fifth type of Christian churches in Albania entered the scientific literature under the name of the three-church basilica (Mamedova 2004, pp. 88–91). But since these monuments consist of three halls located in one building, we prefer to use the term "three-hall church" (Khalilov 2011, pp. 161–164). Similar churches in the South Caucasus were characteristically mainly for the Christian (Diophysite) culture of Georgia, and were built by them until the 10th century. Analogous monuments are also found in Europe (Balkans) and Western Asia (Syria) (Mamedova 2004, p. 91). Some experts consider these monuments to be a special type of Christian church that arose on the basis of the three-aisled basilica (Chikoidze, 1969, p. 129). The appearance of churches of this type was associated with "the need to perform church service several times a day, with the prohibition to perform it with the same altar" (Mamedova 2004, p. 91).

The church located not far from Pipan (Zagatal District) (Fig. 35), was originally a one-hall religious building, the side halls and the western corridor (narthex) were built later (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 23). These different phases were confirmed by the fact that the wall joints do not bond together (Mamedova 2004, p. 90). The semicircular apse of the middle hall does not go beyond the rectangular plan. The raised bema has an altar against the wall and two small niches in the form of a trapezoid in the northeast and southeast (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 23). At the entrance to the middle hall there are steps. The arch, carried by two pilasters, supports the vaulting of the hall. Under this hall there is a half-underground room with

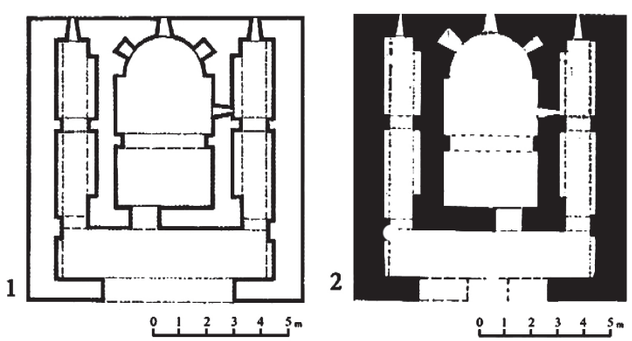

Fig. 35. Pipan Church. 1. Plan (G. G. Mamedova); 2. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova)

a height of 3 m. The length of the middle hall is 6.50 m and 3.20 m wide, according to A. A. Karakhmedova, while and according to G. G. Mamedova measured it as 3.40 m wide (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 23; Mamedova 2004, p. 88). This hall is the tallest (about 6.50 m) chamber in the church. In height, the western corridor and side halls are lower than the middle hall. The side halls, half of which are at a lower level than the floor of the middle hall, have the lowest height. Each side hall has one entrance from the western area through the narthex. In these side halls, like the middle hall, arches support the vault which are carried on a couple of pilasters. At the eastern part of the side halls, apparently, there were rectangular bemas without semi-domes, although A. A. Karakhmedova considers the lateral rooms not as halls, but as pastophoria (Karakhmedova 1986, pp. 23–24). However, the length of the room suggests the opposite. The general entrance to the church is located in western wall, with steps leading up to it. The church was built of river stones and limestone and the roof was tiled. In the vicinity of the church there are traces of other buildings and the remains of a stone wall. A. A. Karakhmedova attributes the foundation of the church to the early Middle Ages, and the side rooms and the western corridor to the 7th–8th centuries (Karakhmedova 1986, pp. 23–24). Perhaps, there was not such a large time span between the first and second phases of construction. The Albanian Church, beginning no later than the 520s and almost to the end of the 7th century, had a Diophysite religious structure. Given this understanding, both construction phases belong to the same period in the 6th–7th centuries.

Not far from the Pipan Church, in the town of *Bukhovlu* (Zagatala District), there is yet another three-hall religious building (Fig. 36). The interior of this longitudinal plan church is 12.40 m long and 5.50 m wide. The middle hall is wider compared to the side halls. There are two T-shaped pilasters on the northern and southern walls of this hall. The semicircular apse , located on the eastern side of the middle hall, does not go beyond the rectangle plan, and floor of the bema is at a higher level than the floor adjacent hall. Flanking the apse, at 1.50 m above the floor, there are horseshoe-shaped niches. It is believed that they could be used as a diaconicon and offertory tables (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 24). On the northern and southern walls of the middle hall there is one passage to the side halls. Each of the side halls have at their eastern end a horseshoe-shaped apse. Archaeological excavations in the northern side hall revealed the remains of the transverse wall and a rectangular

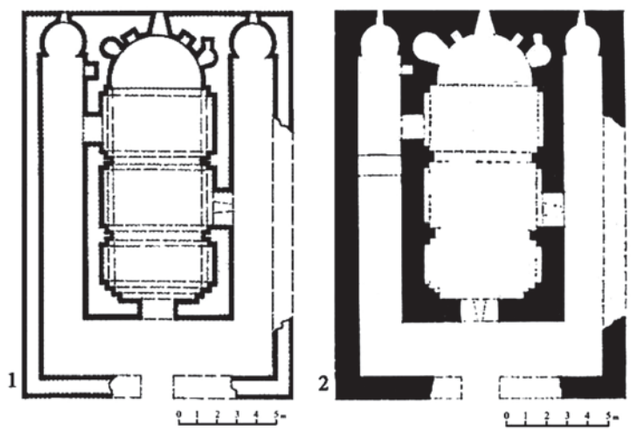

Fig. 36. Church of Bukhovlu. 1. Plan (G. G. Mamedova); 2. Plan (A. A. Karakhmedova)

niche. This wall, built later than the hall itself, divides its interior into eastern and western parts. It is believed that an altar could have been placed in the eastern end (Mamedova 2004, p. 90). The remains of other buildings were discovered on the area of the church site. The church was built of stone and brick. The pilasters and ogival wall arches were made of square bricks (25×25×4 cm). This religious structure had a tiled roof. A. A. Karakhmedova dated the church to the 7th–8th centuries (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 24). However, the use of square bricks in the construction of the Bukhovlu Church to some extent indicates a later chronology for this religious building. Taking into account that during the 50–60s of the 10th century the Albanian Church was officially a Diophysite religious organization, the Bukhovlu church can be attributed to that time.

The sixth type of the Christian religious buildings in Albania is represented by cave churches. These religious buildings, with no doubt, arose during the time of Christian oppression, when its followers were forced to celebrate the divine liturgy secretly. It is known that in the middle of the 5th century, Sasanian Persia intensified the process of pushing out Christianity from the South Caucasus. The presence of the Arab Caliphate in Albania during the 7th-10th centuries Göyüşov caused the Catholicos Ioannes (798–823) to relocated his main residence and the cathedra of the Albanian church from the capital city of Barda in the lowlands to the smaller town of Berdakur, located in the mountainous part of Karabakh, and this seemed to increase in the number of Albanian cave churches (Göyüşov 1986, p. 120). According to Kirakos (13th century), in the 12th–13th centuries even the Albanian Catholics settled in one cave and from there headed the Albanian church (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 125). The term "rock church" used by G. G. Mamedova in relation to cave churches does not fully reflect the nature of these monuments, since it is possible to think of a church located on a rock. This term is also not consistent with the data of Kirakos (Mamedova 2004, p. 209).

One of the Albanian cave churches was discovered by archaeologists on the rocky bank of the Khachynchai river, on the northern foothill of *Bozdag* mountain (Agdam District). This church is cut into the rock at an altitude of 300 m above the level of the riverbed. The oval-shaped cave is 8 m long, 3.50 m wide and 4.70 m tall. An oval-shaped altar apse was cut on the eastern wall of the cave within the area of 2 m². The interior of the church is decorated with crosses of various shapes. In the western part of the church there was found an altar, located on a wide platform. Below this site, there are burial chambers carved within the living rock. Taking into consideration the burial and shape of the cross, Bozdag Church was first assigned to a rather long period of time – between the 4th and 10th centuries (Göyüşov and Guliyev 1971, p. 19). Later, a more specific date was reached, indicating the 8th century (Göyüşov 1984, p. 99).

The seventh type of Albanian church consists of chapels located in "semi-dugouts". These religious buildings were usually built on trade routes, along roads where cattle herds traveled to summer or winter pastures, sometimes above the markets, abattoirs, etc.

(Göyüşov 1986, p. 120). A number of chapels of this type had a round shape and a wooden roof. Inside, a cruciform stone was placed over the altar. According to R. B. Göyüşov, the first semi-dugout chapels appeared earlier than the above-ground chapels (Göyüşov 1984, p. 98).

One of such monuments was found in the settlement of *Sygnag* (Nagorno-Karabakh). The diameter of this chapel was about 4.70 m. Depending on the ground level, the western side of the church was embedded in the ground to a depth of 1.90 m, and the eastern end to 0.96 m. From the inside, the walls were lined with one row of river stones. A cruciform stone was installed in the eastern part of the chapel. The remains of wooden posts were revealed in four places of this structure. It is believed that this chapel had a vaulted roof (Göyüşov 1984, p. 97). Chapels of this type were found on Bozdag mountain (Agdam District), in the villages of Yaglevend (Fizuli District), Khajilar (Agdash District) and in other places. It is believed that cruciform stones began to appear in the South Caucasus since the 9th century (Arakelyan, 2003, p. 344). Given this, the early chapels, semi-dugouts with cruciform stones can be dated to this time. Apparently, they were preceded by a semi-dugout chapel without cruciform stones.

One of these semi-dugouts of a quadrangular shape without a cruciform stone was revealed during archaeological excavations of the *Kilselitepe* site (Gabala District). The church has a shape close to a trapezoid. The length of the northern wall is 7.50 m, the southern one is 7.35 m, the eastern end is 6.20 m, and the western end is 5.92 m (Alyshov 2013, p. 145). The walls with a thickness of 0.90 m, are built of carved stones and rubble masonry. The bonding material was lime mortar. The surface of the walls on the inside was clad with hewn stones embedded in the wall to a depth of 12–38 cm. Unlike the western wall, the northern and southern walls were clad, starting from a height of 0.40–0.50 m from the floor level of the church, and the eastern wall – from a height of 0.40–0.50 m from the floor level of the apse. Judging by the plan, the altar apse was located on the eastern side and had a quadrangular shape (Alyshov 2013, p. 152. Fig. 7). The red tint of some part of the surface of the eastern wall indicates that fires were kindled there to illuminate the interior of the church (Alyshov 2013, p. 149). During the clearing of the apse there was found an altar pedestal made of stones. The primary height of the altar was 0.50 m, and later it was increased by 18 cm, which is explained by N. A. Alyshov as indicating the transition from Diophysitism to Monophysitism (Alyshov 2013, p. 148). To ascend to the apse, stone steps were constructed on two sides, next to which there was found one within a recess with a diameter of 0.30 m, which is confirmed by the remains of dust and ash in one of them. There are two niches in the northern and southern walls. The entrance to the church was located on the western wall, on its surface there were cut four images of the cross measuring 18–19 cm high and 11–15 cm wide. Four carved crosses measuring 15–19×11–15 cm were also affixed on the eastern wall. The floor of the room was paved with rock stones of various sizes (Alyshov 2013, p. 150). Excavation in the interior of this building revealed a large

number of porous stones, as well as numerous fragments of tiles, allowing N. A. Alyshov to form the conclusion that this church had a vaulted ceiling inside and a gable tiled roof outside (Alyshov 2013, p. 147). Another structure larger in size adjoins the western wall of this religious building, and its structure and masonry are not bonded to the wall which, apparently, indicates that it was later attached to the church. The thickness of the walls of this building is in the shape of a trapezoid measuring 1.80 m. The interior length of this building is 7–8.50 m and its width is 4.50–7 m. The entrance to this room is located in its southern wall. Archaeological excavations uncovered the remains of 20 pillars designed to support the roof of this building. Among the archaeological materials discovered in the church, there are fragments of glass bottles, as well as simple and glazed ceramic vessels. The fragment of glazed vessels dated back to the 9th–11th centuries (Alyshov 2013, p. 150). According to N. A. Alyshov, this church was built in the late 7th – early 8th century and continued to function until the late Middle Ages (Alyshov 2013, p. 150). The initial height of the altar apse (0.50 m) indicates that this church was built as a Diophysite religious building. As a result of the situation in Albania at the end of the 7th – early 8th centuries this was hardly possible, therefore we assume that this church could be built no later than the middle of the 7th century.

The eighth type of Albanian church (portable tent-church) can be restored based on the data of the *History of Albanians*, which states the following:

> He ordered a wooden folding tabernacle to be made and covered it with red fur and white linen. The inside was appointed to serve as an abode for the saints and residence of the holy books. Shushanika [wife of Vachagan III, per *M. Khalilov*], the queen of Agvania, had a strong faith. The virtuous woman ordered, at her own expense, the construction of a large tent made of red fur and to pitch it like a church over the tabernacle of the saints, where also the king, clergy and many of the people could dwell. This tent, in the heat, kept the tabernacle cool and kept it dry during times of dampness due to rain. She surrounded and covered the large tent with a linen curtain; it included the king's section so that during the service, he would be in front of the holy cross and the blessed saints of Christ – when he kneeled to pray to God and listened to the reading of the inspired books. Since he always carried the relics of the blessed saints with him, he ordered a baldachin to be made in the name of the saints and, having also trimmed it with red fur and wrapped it with a prime white cloth, he attached a golden cross to the ciborium, that was adorned with precious stones and gold, and had carved the king's name on it. A lot of colorful fabrics were presented for the building from the royal crown; the images of the crosses shone brightly; from the royal stables were selected white excellent horses, who they loved very much. He ordered the tails of horses to be painted red, and appointed a minister to serve at the baldachin of saints. But for the saints, for the Gospel and for other inspired books, he ordered a chariot to be drawn with white bulls that would raise the tabernacle of the saints" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 19).

Simpler forms of such portable churches were accessible and convenient for Albans on long trips, as well as for those who were engaged in cattle breeding.

The first **monasteries** on the territory of Albania appeared after the declaration of Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century. One of them was the *Ners-Mirkh* Monastery (Jervshtik). The *History of the Albanians* reports on its existence long before Vachagan III came to power (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 7). It is known that another monastery was built in 338 in the Albanian village of *Gaku* by the Syrian monks (Khallov 2011, p. 168; *History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 14). In the early Middle Ages, the Albanians also built monasteries far beyond the borders of Albania, in the holy city of Jerusalem. The list of these monasteries was compiled by Anastas Vardapet in the 8th century (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 52; Kirakos Gandzaketsi, 1976, p. 74). It is known that the hermit Banon, who arrived from Albania, built the *Panda* Monastery east of the Mount of Olives, which at the time of compiling the list was at the disposal of an Albanian priest. Some monasteries in Jerusalem could not be retained by the Albanians: for example, the *Artsakh Monastery In the Name of the Blessed Virgin* and the Shrine of the Relics of St. Stephen, as well as in the monastery of *Mruvo in the Name of 40 Martyrs* (located near Mount of Olives) was ruled by Muslim Arabs. Some monasteries had two rulers; so, for instance, half of the *Amaras* monastery was run by one woman named Grigorik and the other half was run by Muslim Arabs. Half of the *Partav Monastery in the Name of the Blessed Virgin* was at the disposal of one Mary, who arrived from the Albanian city of Shamkor, while the other half was owned by Muslim Arabs. And the *Kalankatu* monastery generally had three owners: half was jointly managed by a Christian Theodore and one Arab, the other half belonged to Muslim Arabs. The names of three other Albanian monasteries that were in the hands of Muslim Arabs had already been forgotten by the time this list was compiled, since "from our negligence they all fell into decay" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 52). In total there were more than 100 Armenian and Albanian monasteries in Jerusalem (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 52).

The placement of some Albanian monasteries in Jerusalem were deliberate. For example, from the *History of the Albanians*, it is known that Partav Monastery was "at the Tower of David", while another Albanian monastery that was captured by Muslim Arabs, towered over the middle of the Jerusalem market (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 52). Hopefully, archaeological excavations will reveal the remains of these monasteries in the future. One Albanian church has been already found in Jerusalem; in 2008, the head of the Christian Udi community of Azerbaijan, Robert Mobili, discovered an *Albanian Church in the Name of St. Jacob* in the central part of Jerusalem, next to the windmill, which is believed to have been established in the 5th–6th centuries (Fig. 37; photo 21).[2] It is possible that in the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai Mountain there were immigrants from Albania. In 1996, Z. Aleksidze revealed that there was a Georgian-Albanian palimpsest there (Aleksidze 2001, 2002).

[2] Editor's Note: Clearly the current building of St. Jacob (Jerusalem) belongs to a much later period based on its characteristics exhibiting Romanesque style.

Fig. 37. Albanian Church of St. Jacob in the city of Jerusalem

The antiquity of the monasteries of Albania is established not only by the data of written sources, but also by some architectural elements. For example, bema of one group of churches included, often within the monastery complexes, has a rectangular shape. According to G. G. Mamedova, a rectangular bema developed from the earliest temples and in the subsequent eras become one of the main characteristics of Albanian churches and chapels (Mamedova 2004, pp. 41, 107). Numerous examples of basilicas with a rectangular bemas are known in Syria. According to A. L. Jacobson, such altars originate from the residential architecture of Antiquity (Jacobson 1985, p. 17). The most significant of Albanian monasteries have survived to the first millennium AD, such as the monastery of St. Elisha, Khudavank Monastery, Eddy Kilse Monastery and the complex of cave monasteries at Keshikchidag, dedicated to St. David.

The Monastery of St. Elisha (Fig. 38) is located in Nagorno-Karabakh, on the left bank of the Elisha River, on the bottom of the Murovdag mountain at an altitude of 2000 m from sea level (Göyüşov 1972; Mammadzade, 1972). The southern side, on which the complex is located, is a sheer cliff, the western and northern sides are covered with dense forests, and the eastern part gradually lowers towards the river (Mammadzade 1972, p. 30). The monastery complex, surrounded by defensive walls, include the main building – the Church of St. Elisha, as well as seven chapels, as well as household and residential buildings. In one of the chapels there was the tomb of the king of Albania Vachagan III. On the territory of the monastery there were found the stones with domestic and religious depictions on the surface. The specialists identify this monastery with the one mentioned

in the *History of the Albanians* – the monastery of St. Brotherhood Ners-Mirkh (Ners-Mikhr) or Jervshtik (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 7; Göyüşov 1984, p. 90–91). The monastery called Ners-Mirkh, founded no later than the 4th–5th centuries, is also mentioned in connection with the events of 704 (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: pp. 8, 9, 11). It is known that in this historical monastery there are kept the relics of St. Elisha that contributed to the appearance in the 13th century of the third name of the monastery – in the Name of St. Elisha. Judging by the epigraphic materials, the monastery complex finally took current shape in the 13th century. The inscription of 1264 made on the wall of the Church of St. Elisha states: "I, Archdeacon Serob, in this holy monastery built the church of the Holy Apostle on its former foundation" (Mamedova 2004, p. 106; Göyüşov 1984, p. 91). Taking this into account, G. G. Mamedova comes to conclusion that the plan of the church built in the year 1264, coincided with the plan of the earlier one (Mamedova 2004, p. 106). It is indicated that the length of the interior of the church is 8 m and 4 m wide (Mammadzade 1972, p. 30; Mamedova 2004, p. 106). According to R. B. Göyüşov, the length of the church is 10 m, and the width is 5.40 m (Göyüşov 1984, p. 92). These figures reflect the dimensions of the exterior, probably, since the walls of the church had a thickness of 0.90 m (Mamedova 2004, p. 106). In 1971, the walls of the church rose to a height of 7 m (Mammadzade 1972, p. 31). A semi-circular apse, not extending beyond the rectangular outlines of the church plan, and its bema is 0.60 m above the floor. The width of the apse and the prayer hall are the same. The church has two entrances (Fig. 38.*1*): the western entrance connects the hall with the narthex, and the southern one allows entering the hall from the outside. The remains of the destroyed roof show that it was vaulted (Mamedova 2004, p. 106). G. G. Mamedova notes that the layout of the church of St. Elisha resembles the early medieval one-aisled churches of Gyavurkala and Mingechavir (Mamedova 2004, p. 106).

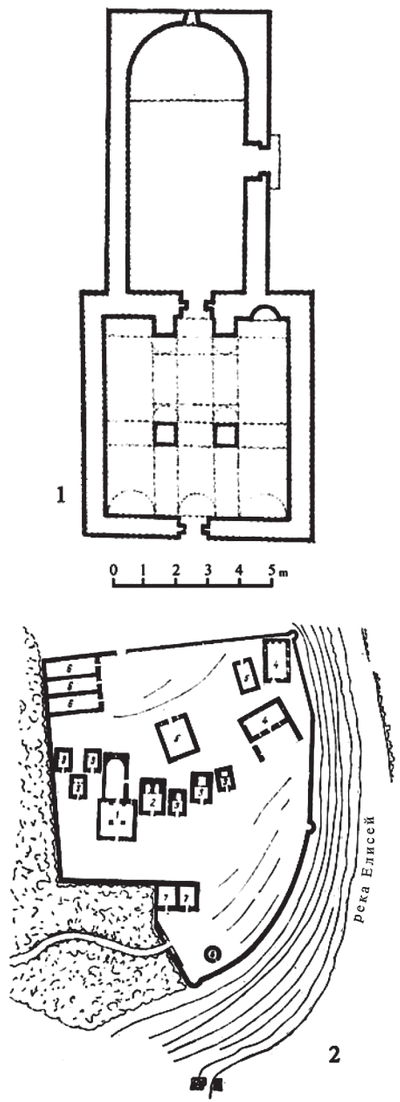

Fig. 38. Church and monastery of St. Elisha: 1. Church Plan(G. G. Mamedova), monastery; 2. General Plan (K. M. Mamedzade)

Archaeological excavations carried out near the eastern wall of the church, revealed that this building survived three construction periods. Its foundation was made of river stones. The main part of the early church remained under the building of the 13th century. The earlier church, in contrast to the later one, was a three-aisled basilica without a narthex and this, in turn, means that a new special foundation was built for the narthex in 1264. The length of the early church is 8.70 m and 4.20 m wide. The horseshoe-shaped apse was on the eastern side of the church. The stone blocks and fired bricks (46×42×13 cm and 39×37×9 cm) were used in the construction of the lower church. In the excavation, there were discovered fragments of ceramic vessels characteristic of the early Middle Ages. In the opinion of R. B. Göyüşov, the early church was built around the 6th century, then it was destroyed in the 9th–10th centuries, in the 11th century began the second stage of construction (Göyüşov 1972; Göyüşov 1984, p. 92). Perhaps the chapel where King Vachagan III was buried could also be erected in the 6th century. Admittedly, epigraphic material indicates that this religious building was built in 1286, however A Mnatsakanyan thinks that in this case the inscription refers to restoration work (1969, p. 194). According to R. B. Göyüşov, a horseman depicted on the outer surface of the wall of the chapel reflects the image of Vachagan III (Göyüşov 1984, p. 98, Fig. 9). Two chapels with dual apses, included in the complex of this monastery have no analogues in the architecture of Albania and the South Caucasus, in the opinion of G. G. Mamedova (2004, p. 107). She suggests that these chapels, being memorials, were erected over two graves where each of the deceased had their own altar for memorial prayers (Mamedova 2004, p. 107).

The *Khudavank* Monastery is located at the source of the Terter River, in the village of Vank (Kelbajar District) (Figs. 39, 40). A number of authors identify Khudavank with the Dadivank monastery mentioned in written sources (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, p. 144, 201; Mamedova 2004, p. 142). The results of the analysis of written sources confirm this opinion (Khalilov 2011, pp. 173–174). The medieval scholar Mkhitar Gosh (1130–1213) reported that in 1145–6 the "holy monastery, founded by the apostle and called Dadui Vank" was burned to the ground (Mkhitar Gosh 1960, p. 14). Thus, the tradition of the foundation of the Khudavank monastery was known in the 12th century. According to this legend, the apostle Thaddaeus went to Armenia with his disciple Dadi (Dadu) to spread Christianity. There Dadi suffered martyrdom, after which his remains were buried in Minor Syunik (Artsakh), and on this site there was built a monastery, which bears his name (Mamedova 2004, p. 142). According to G. G. Mamedova, this suggests that the place on which the monastery stands, was already considered as shrine in the 1st–2nd centuries (Mamedova 2004, p. 142). The earliest building that is part of the Khudavank monastery complex is the one-aisled church of the early Middle Ages (Fig. 40, 2). This religious building, the walls of which are composed of hewn stones, has a length of 16.20 m and is 5.80 m wide. The semicircular apse, located on the eastern side, above the floor, does not go beyond the rectangular outline of the church. Three pairs of pilaster, located on the

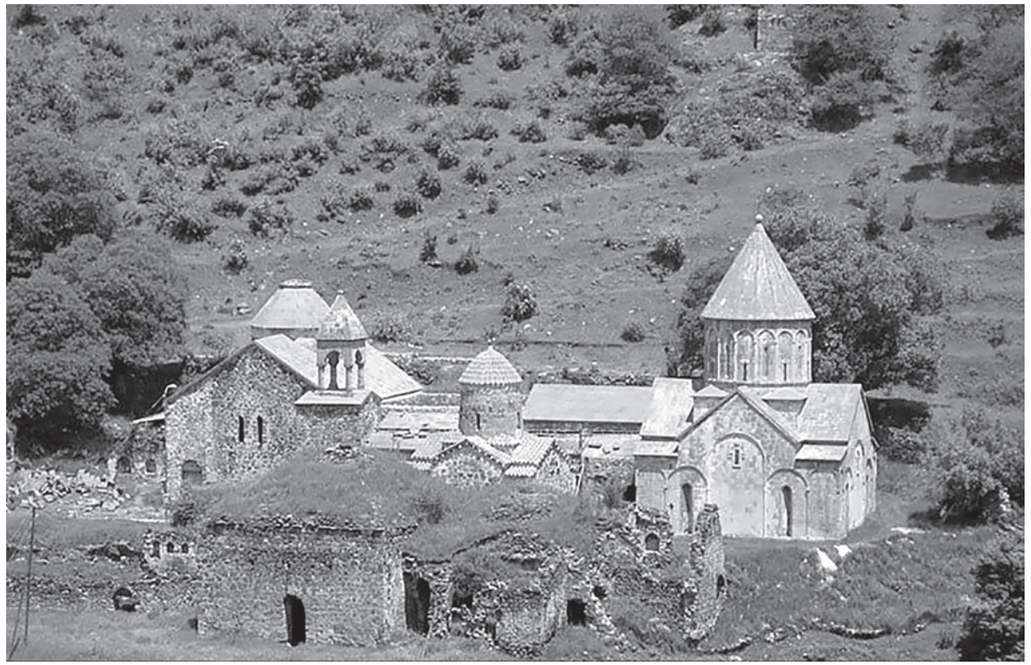

Fig. 39. Khudavank Monastery

northern and southern walls, support the arches of the vaulted dome. Deep niches are form on these walls between the pilasters.

The entrances of the church are located on the western and southern walls. Asymmetric pastophoria of unequal sizes located in the northeastern and southeastern corners of the church, judging by the epigraphic materials, were erected later, in the 13th century. R. B. Göyüşov, who conducted archaeological excavations on the southwestern side of the foundation of the church, dated this monument to the 6th–7th centuries taking into account fragments of ceramic vessels found in the excavation, as well as architectural features (Göyüşov 1984, p. 86).

The monastery complex of *Yeddy Kilse* is located north from the village of Lekit, in the direction of Lekit-Ketuklu village (Gakh District) (Fig. 41). The translation of "Yeddy Kilse" means "seven churches". And indeed, the complex includes seven religious' structures (two churches of basilica type and five chapels), as well as utilitarian buildings. The present complex is the largest among the most famous monasteries and is located on the left bank of the Kura River (Mamedova 2004, p. 147). It was suggested that some chapels were mausoleums at the same time (Useinov et al., 1963, p. 33). The results of archaeological excavations conducted by A. A. Karakhmedova, confirmed this hypothesis (Karakhmedova 1990, p. 39). The monastery complex was surrounded by a stone defensive wall, from which only some remains are extant. The defensive system of the monastery also included the Kilse-Kala Fortification ("church-fortress"), which survived in ruins on the top of the eastern spur

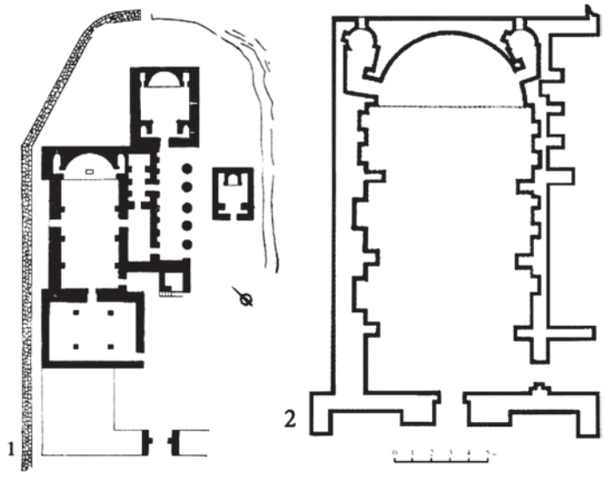

Fig. 40. Church and monastery of Khudavank: 1. Monastery plan (D. A. Akhundov); 2. Church plan (G. G. Mamedova)

of the mountain (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 11). The chapels located on the slopes of the western and eastern spurs of the mountain, along the ridge, could serve as watch-posts controlling the paths leading to the monastery (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 11). Taking into account these military installations, G. G. Mamedova suggested that this complex could have belonged to a large order (Mamedova 2004, p. 147). The monastery had two entrances, the main of which was on the southeastern side of the complex, and the other one was on the southwest. A covered portico was partially built over the road leading from the southwestern entrance to the side of the churches, as indicated by stones and fragments of tiles scattered on at the sides (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 12). During the construction of the complex, the terrain descending on the terraces led towards the Lekit River gorge. Religious buildings were located on a leveled lower terrace. Some places on this site had landscaped, as indicated by the infilling. Geologically, this site is enclosed by hills forming a semicircle. On the terraces, there are extant remains of the walls made of river stones. G. G. Mamedova believes that there were once residential and household buildings included in the ensemble (Mamedova 2004, p. 147). A. A. Karakhmedova thinks that some of these ramparts served as retaining walls to strengthen the terraces (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 12).

One of the basilicas is located on the western side of the complex (Fig. 41.1-2). Three apses on the eastern side of the church are the form of a semicircle going beyond the rectangular ground plan of this structure. On the western side, this domed basilica has a rectangular narthex; at some point the dome had collapsed. Judging by the fragments found, the roof of this religious building was covered with tiles. The church was built of river stones, limestone. and brick. The interior is divided by a pair of piers forming three aisles, among which the nave is wider than the side aisles. The lateral aisles at their eastern ends lead to the pastophoria with semicircular apses. The pastophoria have two entrances: one from the side of the bema, the other one, from the side of the corresponding side aisles. The prothesis and the diaconicon are equipped with large niches. The total length of the structure including the narthex is 24 m and 13.80 m wide. The entrances to the church were on the western, northern, and southern walls. The survey trenches within the church revealed the cultural layer being 2 m deep with three building phases: 1) 5th–6th centuries;

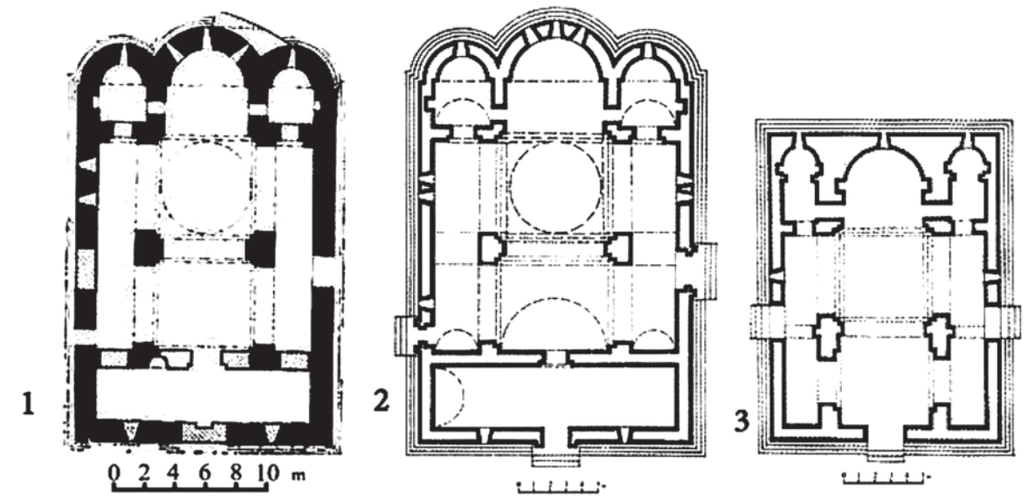

Fig. 41. Churches of the Yeddy Kilse Monastery. Plans: 1. Western church (A. A. Karakhmedova); 2. Plan (G. G. Mamedova);3. Eastern church (G. G. Mamedova)

2) 7th–8th centuries; 3) 11th–12th centuries. Archaeological excavations revealed a three-step architectural foundation and narthex. Initially the side aisles were connected to the narthex and thus created a tripartite entrance. The dome was erected at the second construction phase. Outside, at the apse, there was found a staircase leading to the roof of the diaconicon, it was built of river stones at the third construction phase. This staircase, as suggested by A. A. Karakhmedova, indicates the use of this Christian church as a mosque by Muslims in the 11th–12th centuries (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 15). In this regard, it is interesting to note that among the fragments of ceramic vessels discovered as a result of archaeological excavations, there are fragments of glazed bowls with inscriptions in the Farsi language (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 15).

The second basilica is located in the eastern part of the monastery complex (Fig. 41.3). Prior to archaeological research, the northern and southern walls, as well as the altar and a pair of piers, were visible on the surface of the ground. Archaeological excavations uncovered the western wall with the entrance to the church, including the pilasters on both sides of the entrance, the diaconicon, etc. Among the archaeological materials found in the diaconicon there were fragments of gray-, black- and red-clay ceramic vessels. The debris of tiles was found in large numbers throughout the church. The walls of the church were made of river stones and limestone. The bonding material was lime mortar. The walls were plastered with lime. There once was painted decoration applied to the surface of the plaster (Karakhmedova 1988, pp. 40–41). The length of this rectangular structure is 19.70 m, its width is 14.30 m. A pair of piers, as well as pilasters on the western wall and ledges between the pastophoria and the altar apse, divide the interior into three aisles. The middle aisle (nave)

is wider than the side aisles. The pastophoria have a length of 4.90 m and a width of 2 m. Each pastophorion on the eastern side and merges with the corresponding semicircular apse, which is smaller in size in comparison to the nave's apse. Each apse does not go beyond the rectangular ground plan and has a semi-dome. On the northern area of the semi-dome, that covers the bema, there are veneer stone slabs. The square base of the dome of the church rested on the piers, the transverse arches, and the pilasters flanking the bema. The rest of the church was covered with a gabled tiled roof, and the roofs of all the aisles were the same height. The pastophoria have two entrances, that connect them respectively with the side aisles and the bema. There is a gap of 1–2 cm between the transverse wall separating the prothesis from the lateral aisles and the northern wall, which indicates that, initially, in the plan of the church, the prothesis was probably not provided, and the side aisles stretched to the eastern wall of this structure. The church's entrances are located in the western, northern, and southern walls. The second basilica of the monastery complex of Yeddy Kilse dates back to the 7th century (Mamedova 2004, p. 82).

The five square chapels that constitute the monastery complex have an identical layout and are roughly the same size. This often indicates that such buildings were built at the same time. The semicircular apse does not extend beyond the square plans of the chapels. Archaeological excavations of one of the chapels revealed limestone cladding, on the wall surface was a depiction of a cross. In the intermediate section between this chapel and another one, and the second basilica, there were two small household jugs dug into the ground and were covered by flagstones (Karakhmedova 1988, p. 41). This chapel was 5.50 m long and 3.80 m wide. Its walls, 0.90–1 m thick, and built using river stones. The outer surface of the walls is lined with well-hewn limestone (50–60.55×33–40.45 cm), the inner surface was covered with light-colored stucco. A lime mortar was used as a bonding material. The two-step foundation of the chapel was built of well-hewn limestone. The entrance to the chapel is on the western wall. The apse, located on the eastern side of the chapel, rises 65 cm above the clay floor of the chamber. However, there are two more levels at the bema (48 cm and 55 cm). This means that it was rebuilt three times. Inside this chapel there are two tombs. Thus, this religious building simultaneously served as a mausoleum.

Fig. 42. Keshikchidag Monastery. Frescoes

On the mountain of *Keshikchidag* (Agstafa District) there is an important complex of cave monasteries, which is declared as the state historical and cultural reserve of Azerbaijan (Figs. 42–44; photographic plates 20–21). This complex [also known as the David Gareja monastery complex], stretching for approximately 25 km, was founded in the 30–50s of the 6th century by the Syrian Monophysite church leader David (Nasibli 2012, p. 278). The main monastery is St. David's Lavra, which is located on the northern slope of the mountain that demarcates Georgia and Azerbaijan (Nasibli 2012, p. 280). The complex consists of more than 70 caves, and according to other sources (Nasibli 2012, p. 281), more than 100 natural and artificial caves on steep cliffs of mountains that are 750–950 m above sea level. Artificial caves were created by carving or hewing the rocks from the sandy cliff face. Each cave has an entrance and windows in the form of loopholes. Some domed caves are square in shape. The low caves, characterized by small sizes, consisted of one or several chambers, among which, along with residential premises, were also domestic rooms, and a chapel. Within the rocks there are carved cisterns to store water. First, with the help of a drainpipe, rainwater was collected in sedimentation tanks, after which the treated water flowed into the cisterns. Given the cold temperatures of the cisterns, a storage area was built on its upper level, where it was possible to store food for a long time. The cave complex also housed the Gyudret spring, a defensive tower, and two Albanian churches. The examination of the archaeological materials indicate that these caves were used intermittently until the 17th century (Mansurov 2005). This is also confirmed by some historical documents (Nasibli 2012, pp. 282–283).

Fig. 43. Keshikchidag Monastery. Frescoes

The *History of the Albanians* also mentions the monastery of Gyuta, the monastery of Kataravank, the monastery of Joseph, the monastery in the Shamkir fortress, the

Fig. 44. Keshikchidag Monastery. Frescoes

monastery in Kalankatu, the monastery in Tkrakert, the monastery in Agatsop and others (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: pp. 8, 13). One group of these historical monasteries has not yet been located, while the other group has not been archaeologically investigated.

Funeral monuments. With the advent of Christianity, fundamental concepts about the afterlife changed among the local Caucasian Albanian. In the era of polytheism, it is assumed that everyone believed that their life would continue at the same manner into the afterlife. If so, the deceased wealthy, unlike the poor, were accompanied by a rich inventory of goods in their burials. According to Christian ideology, paradise awaited only sinless people who did not depend on their wealth for salvation. Therefore burial without grave good began to develop. Christian churches began to serve a parallel function of mausoleum, where people who had played a special role to the church were buried within; or alternatively, a chapel church was built at the burial site. The presence of a burial in the church was more a characteristic of Diophysite religious buildings (Nasibli 2012, p. 284). Monophysite churches, when they contained burials and later turned into chapels, they were forbidden to be used for other Christian rites and ceremonies, in particular, weddings and christenings (Nasibli 2012, p. 284).

Christian funerary memorials differ in form and material from the buildings that they developed from (Khalilov 2009, pp. 60–67). Typological differences among funerary memorials were due to local resources, depending on the geographical environment, the evolutionary process in the formation of the burial rites, as well as to some extent, the social stratification in society (Göyüşov 1984, p. 109).

The last factor is related to the hierarchical positioning of various types of burials in one burial monument (Gyushev 1984, p. 109). Archaeological research has established the following types of Christian burials of Albania: 1) ground burials; 2) burial chambers constructed of mud bricks; 3) tombs built of fired bricks; 4) catacomb burials; 5) tiled burials; 6) stone boxes; 7) stone tombs; 8) stone sarcophagi; and 9) rock tombs. Another classification can be made that includes the burials of famous historical figures of Albania.

Ground burials. In 1977 eight burials of this type were discovered on the site of Gabala (Selbir) at a depth of 1.40 m. In three of them, the skeleton was in a coffin, and the rest were ordinary ground burials. The skeletons were fixed in an elongated position on the back, hands were in the abdomen, and the head was oriented to the west. These Christian burials were dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Gadirov 1980, p. 21). An interesting ground burial was revealed in Mingachevir. The skeleton was located on the left side in a crouched position. The middle part of the backbone rested upon the rest of the wall of one of the Christian churches. The head was directed to the northwest, and the legs, chained in iron shackles, to the southeast (Fig. 45). An iron pin and bronze earrings were found near the jaw. At a distance of 50 cm from the skeleton, there was a silver coin minted on behalf of Sasanian Yazdegerd I (399–420). It is known that the Catholicos of Albania Nerses-Bakur, arrested in 704, was buried in fetters (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 7). The place of his burial is

unknown. Nersekh – brother of the king of Albania, Varaz-Tiridat, who came to power in 681 – was known for cutting off the head of his opponents, usually bound their legs in iron chains (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: p. 22). Perhaps the coin was not related to the burial, since it was found before the discovery of the burial and only after revealing the skeleton was included in the burial inventory (Aslanov 1953, p. 246). Taking into account the coin, G. M. Aslanov attributed the burial to the 5th–6th centuries, However, in the summary of the article, he had indicated a different date – 7th–8th centuries (Aslanov 1953, p. 248, 250).

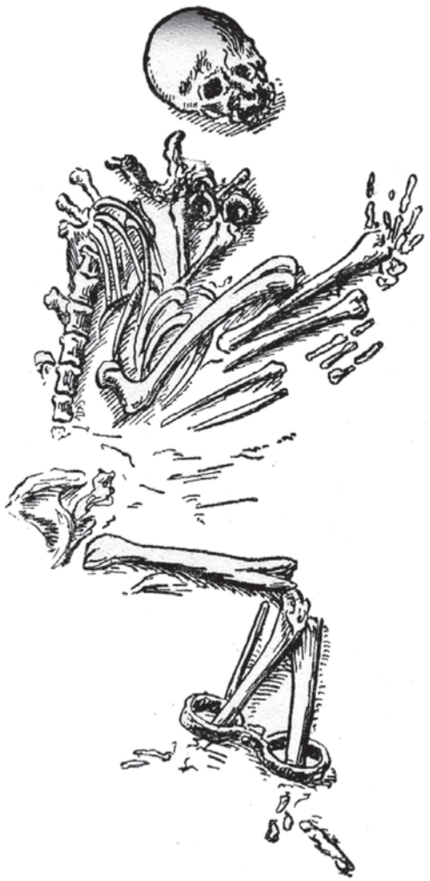

Fig. 45. Mingachevir. Ground burial (G. M. Aslanov)

In chambers of other ground burials of Mingachevir, with a depth of 0.50–1.50 m, contained supine skeletons that had their, legs directed eastwards and head at the west. The arms were mostly crossed in the abdomen or laid flat along the body, and in some graves, one arm was on the abdomen, and the other one was extended along the body. In the underground burials of Mingachevir, the burial of the deceased in a wooden coffin is quite common. Some ground burials with a depth of only 0.25–0.30 m had a wooden lid. One group of burial chambers had a rectangular shape, the eastern side of the other chambers was semicircular, and on their western side there was a narrow niche where only the head of the deceased could fit. In several burials, there were found small jewelry items (silver ring, iron bracelet, glass bead, etc.). The remains of silk fabric (twill) of Chinese production of the 8th–10th centuries were found in one of the burials. The majority of the Christian ground burials of Mingachevir is dated to the 8th–10th centuries (Vahidov 1961, pp. 133–137).

A ground burial with a wooden lid was discovered near the altar of the basilica in Barda. It had a length of 2.10 m, a width of 0.82 m and a depth of 1.57 m. The deceased was laid on his back, with his head at the western end. The arms were bent at the elbows at right angles and were positioned in the abdomen. A red clay spherical vessel with three legs was found in the burial chamber, which was identified by R. B. Göyüşov as a censer (Göyüşov 1984, p. 110). Its middle part is framed by repeating stylized images of animals and birds. The burial is synchronous with the construction of the church and dates back to the 9th century.

There are two types of burials discovered in Amaras: "ordinary" and stone-covered. In the "ordinary" ground graves the skeletons are oriented east-west, and positioned on their right side in a slightly crouched manner; one hand is extended along the body, the other one is raised towards the face. There were no funerary goods. This position of the skeleton is considered characteristic of the period of transition from paganism to Christianity (Göyüşov 1975, Table VIII.2, p. 82). In the burials with stone coverings, the deceased are laid on their back and stretched out, their arms are crossed and lie on their chests. Funerary goods was are also absent (Göyüşov 1975, Table VIII.4, p. 82).

There are up to twenty ground burials covered with stone slabs investigated by the Gyavurkala monument. The deceased are on the left side in a slightly twisted position, both arms are raised towards the face (Göyüşov 1984, p. 109). Likewise, three similar burials, covered with stone slabs, were found inside a Christian church in Shykhly. In two burials there was no grave goods. Only in the burial No. 3 there were found a bronze pin with a spherical carnelian head and fragments of iron rods. The burials, as well as the church, are dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Göyüşov 1984, p. 88). The simple pit burials covered in soil, in Christian contexts, were also found in the sites of Kish, Orta Zeizid (Sheki District), Kilvar (Shabran District) and others (Göyüşov 1984, p. 117; Karakhmedova 1986, p. 20; Kerimov and Sturfiel, 2003; Kerimov 2008, Fig. 9).

Burial Chambers Constructed of Mud Bricks. There were five burials discovered in Mingachevir. The mud bricks used in their construction were square (45×45×8 cm) and rectangular (45×32×7 cm and 46×27×9 cm). There were a maximum seven rows of bricks in the masonry walls of the chamber. Chambers were covered by wooden beams; in only one case (burial No. 8) there was a ceiling made of bricks. The length of the pits where the chambers were built were 2.65-2.85 m, the widths were 1.40–1.70 m, and the depths were 1.25 m; the internal dimensions of the chambers were1.80–1.85 m, 0.55–0.75 m wide, and 0.60–0.75 m in height.

The skeletons were found within wooden coffins or on the floor of burial chambers. The coffin in the burial No. 8 was 1.40 m long, 0.65 m wide, and 0.40 m tall. The floors were paved with wood or mud bricks, in some cases stones were placed under the wooden floor. The deceased were laid either on their back, arms were extended along the body, or were positioned on the abdomen; or the skeleton laid on the left side in a crouched position, the left hand was raised to the side of the jaw, the right hand placed on the abdomen. The skeleton was oriented in an east-west direction with the skull at the western end. In one of the chambers (No. 4) there were found traces of fire on the floor covered with yellow clay, as well as on the lower surface of the coffin. The thickness of the ash layer reached 5 cm. There were no grave goods (Figs. 46.1). In the burial No. 6 (Figs. 46.2; 47), three jewelry items were found (bronze and agate rings, as well as an iron pin).

In the burial No. 8 there was uncovered three agate beads, a pair of gold earrings with a pendant of glass and agate beads, and three gold adornments, each of which has three

pendants. The funeral chambers constructed from mud bricks are dated to the 5th–6th centuries (Vahidov 1961, pp. 128–137; Göyüşov 1984, p. 110). Tombs of a similar design are known in the Near East, in Babylon (Fig. 46.3). However, in these burials, fired bricks were used as its construction material (Litvinsky 1983, p. 85–86, Tab. XXIX 1, 2, 4, 9).

Tombs Built of Fired Bricks. Burials of this type are found in the monuments of Mingachevir and Shatal. The square bricks (30×30×6.5 cm) were used during the construction of the Mingachevir tomb (Fig. 48.*1*). The ganch (*gaja*) was used as a bonding material [which usually consists of a gypsum and clay mixture]. The tomb rose on a rectangular base (2.83×1.40 m) and had a barrel vault formed by bricks. The floor was paved with bricks. Inside, the length of the burial chamber reached 2.21 m, 0.53 m in width, and 0.91 m in height. The surface of the walls on the inside was plastered with clay. The deceased was laid stretched-out on his back and his arms were positioned alongside the body. The skull of the skeleton was at the western end. On the skeleton there were the remains of Chinese silk fabric of a light brown color of two weaves (taffeta and twill). The Mingachevir tomb was dated back to 5th–6th centuries (Vahidov 1961,

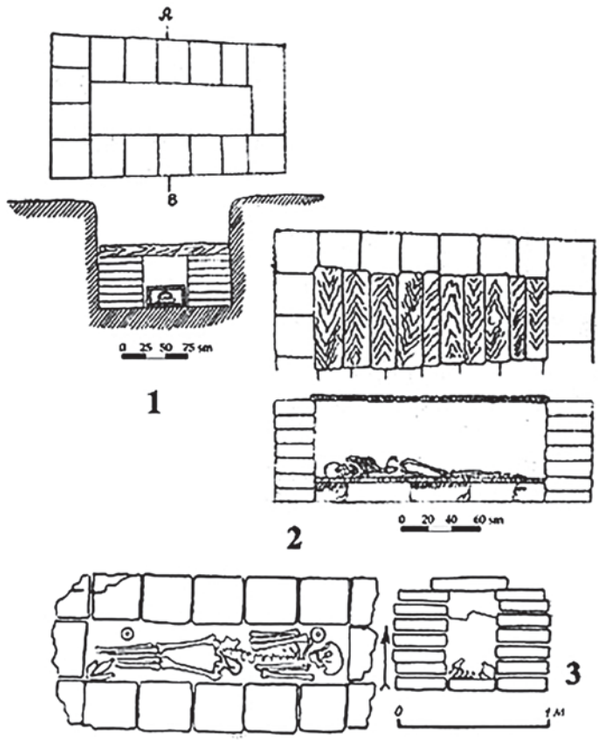

Fig. 46. Mingachevir. Burial chambers constructed of mud bricks. 1-2. Diagrams of Burial No. 6 (R. M. Vahidov); 3. Tomb Plan, Babylon (Iraq) (B. A. Litvinsky)

Fig. 47. Mingachevir. Burial chamber constructed of mud bricks (R. M. Vahidov and V. P. Fomenko)

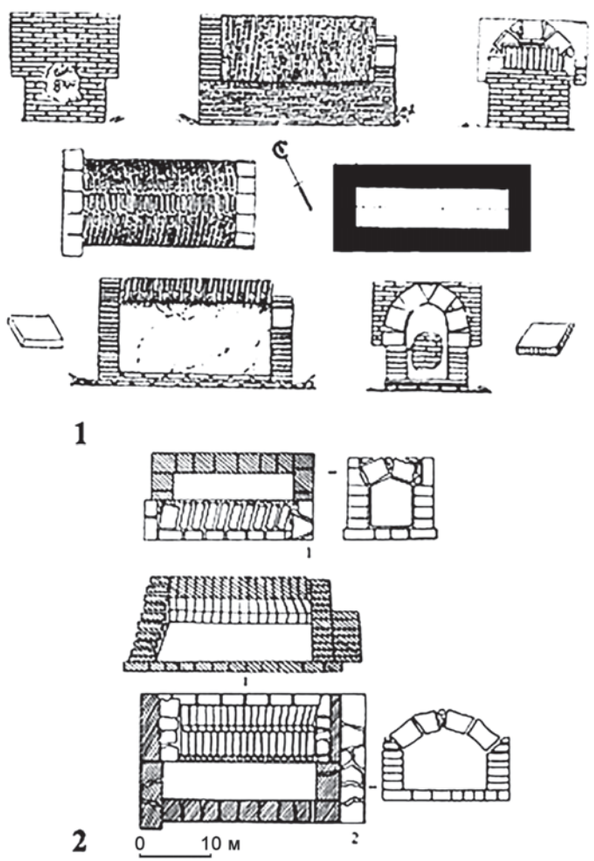

Fig. 48. Tomb Diagrams: 1. Mingachevir Tomb No. 5, built of fired bricks (R. M. Vahidov); 2 Yorgan-tepe (Iraq) (B. A. Litvinsky)

p. 129–131; Göyüşov 1984, p. 111). It was noted that the fired bricks used in its construction differ from other square bricks from the later part of the Middle Ages because of their large size (Vahidov 1961, p. 136). The square fired bricks in Mingachevir were used only in the construction of the aforementioned tomb. Presumably, this monument can also be dated to the 7th–8th centuries. The tomb in Shatal is also built of square bricks measuring 30×30×6 cm (Mammadov 1993, p. 44–46). The tombs of a similar construction are located in Yorgan-tepe (Iraq) (Fig. 48.*2*). However, they are attributed to the 3rd century (Litvinsky 1983, p. 90. Tab. XXXIII 2, 3 and XXXVII).

Catacomb Burials. This type of burial was discovered in Mingachevir (Aslanov 1963). The burial chamber No. 152, found at a depth of 2.90 m, had an oval shape. The entrance was covered with carved stones. The height of the catacomb reached 1 m. The floor level of the chamber was 0.55 m lower than the last step of the dromos. There were six skeletons in a crouched position on the left side, with a skull oriented to the west; they were placed on four wooden planks horizontally laid on the floor of the chamber. The deceased were buried in clothes with jewelry (beads, bracelets, rings). On the eastern wall of the chamber at a height of 0.45 m above the floor, there was a carved equilateral cross. Similar images of the cross were unearthed in the burial No. 16 and in other catacombs; for example, cross was depicted on a bronze ring and a pin found in the burial No. 16. It is interesting that the crosses on the front of the ring and on the wall of the chamber of the catacomb No. 16 have the same shape, differing only in size (Göyüşov 1984, p. 100). In the burial No. 148 on the skeleton, there are remains of fabrics on which an equilateral cross was embroidered with yellow threads. In this burial site, there is also a mass grave, as in the catacomb No. 13;

here there were 12 people interred whose right hands were raised towards their faces, and were placed on the left side of the body. Only few adornments were found in the chamber. The skeletons in the late Mingachevir catacombs were on their back in stretched-out position, their skulls were at the western end. An identical position was also observed in catacomb No. 44. According to R. B. Göyüşov, the process of Christianization of the pagan burial rite in the catacombs of Mingachevir began in the 6th century (Göyüşov 1984, p. 63). Based on this, the Christian catacomb burials of Mingachevir can be dated to the 6th–8th centuries.

Tiled Burials. The only burial of this type so far has been identified by archaeological excavations in the first (western) church of the Yeddy Kilse monastery complex, at the level of the lower part of the basement. In the construction of the burial chamber, there were used flat roof tiles covered with a light engobe (41×31 cm), similar in shape to heat-insulating. This type of tile was not fixed in the church itself. A turquoise-colored paste bead and a ring were uncovered in the burial with a very decaying child's skeleton. A. A. Karakhmedova attributed tile burial to the era of the early Middle Ages (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 16). Most likely, this burial in chronological respect corresponds to the first building phase of the church and can be dated to the 5th–6th centuries.

Stone crates. A burial chamber of a similar type, revealed in Barda, was built of unhewn stone slabs with a length of 1.17 and a width of 0.52 m. The skeleton was stretched out on their backs. Both hands of the deceased were raised towards the face. The head was at the western end of the grave. Near the skeleton there were three spindles which, according to R. B. Göyüşov, indicate the profession of the deceased (Göyüşov 1984, p. 110). The burial dates back to the 9th century.

In a stone box, found under the tiled burial in Yeddy Kilse, there was double burial. The inventory consisted of only one paste bead (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 16). This burial, apparently, can also be correlated with the first building phase of the western church and can be dated back to the 5th century.

In contrast, eleven stone coffins were studied in the Atachai burial ground. They had a length of 0.90–2.15 m, a width of 0.35–0.90 m, a depth of 0.20–0.55 m. The heads of the deceased were at the western end (burials Nos. 1, 2, 5–7, 9, 11) and in some cases at the southwest (burials Nos. 4, 8, 10). There contained only one grave in each container. With the exception of stone coffin No. 5, where the skeleton was in a half-wrinkled position on the right side, in other burial containers the deceased were stretched out on their back. The arms were crossed at the chest, or on their stomach, and the left arm lay on the abdomen and the right arm was extended along the body. Grave goods discovered in stone crates Nos. 3–5, 7, 9–10, consisted of jewelry items (beads made of various materials, glass medallion, gold earring, etc.). In the chambers of burials Nos. 1, 4, 5, 7, 8 there are pieces of coal, and in the chamber No. 11 under the skeleton there were traces of ash. In the stone coffins Nos. 8, 10, 11 under the skeleton there are traces of ocher. It is possible that it was caused by the fabrics with such a color. In graves Nos. 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 there were fragments of ceramics. In

the burial No. 3 the head of the deceased rested on flat stone. In the chamber No. 8, the buried laid on the stone-paved part of the floor. The researchers, given the direction and position of the skeletons, as well as the absence of funerary inventory, with the exception of jewelry, consider these burials as early Christian, belonging to the 5th–8th centuries (Koshkarly, Babayev, Asadov, and Babayeva 2011, p. 274–275). This opinion is quite acceptable, but most likely such burials with some pagan elements were characteristic of the 4th–5th centuries. Stone coffins were also placed in the churches of Kish (Fig. 1) and Orta Zeizid (Karakhmedova 1986, p. 20; Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003; Kerimov 2008, Fig. 9), etc.

Stone tombs. The burials of this type were investigated in the monuments of Yaglevend (Fizuli District) and Yeddy Kilse (Gakh District). The Yaglevend burial ground with tombs is located on the crest of the mountain with a length of approximately 1.5 km and a width of about 1 km. Nine tombs were studied here. Rectangular burial chambers with arched ceilings built from hewn limestone had a length of 1.22–3 m, a width of 0.98–2.70 m, a height of 1.50–1.93 m. All burials have an entrance, covered with flat stone panels, on the southern side. The skulls were located near the northern wall facing the westward. With the exception of the burial No. 6, the skeletons' the left hands were raised towards the face, and the right hands were on the chest. Only in the burial No. 3 was there a double burial, in the others there is only one body. There is almost no grave goods in the tombs. In the burial No. 2, there was found an early medieval manually formed clay milk jug; in the burial No. 7 on the neck of the deceased were metal beads. One of the participants in the archaeological excavations, without specifying a date, attributed these tombs to the era of the early Middle Ages (Göyüşov 1984, p. 111).

Larger stone tombs were found in the Yeddy Kilse monastery complex (Karakhmedova 1986a, p. 78; Karakhmedova 1990, pp. 37, 39). In one of the tombs constructed of river stones of various sizes, the wall 1.10 m was thick and 11.40 m long, and survived to a height of 1.20 m. The second tomb, which is in a shape close to trapezoid, had a length of 5.20 m. The width of its northern wall reached 2.40 m, the southern wall was 2.10 m. The floor was at a depth of 1.60 m. A dromos connected the tomb with the surface having narrow and short steps. Its walls were inaccurately crafted from unhewn river tones of various sizes without the use of a cohesive mortar, i.e. using the dry masonry method. Three steps of the dromos were paved with flat river stones. The burial chamber was located below the level of the dromos. The entrance from the dromos to the tomb was 1.10 m wide. The skeletal remains in these tombs did not survive. Taking into account the location of the fragments of stones and tiles, it is believed that the ceiling of the first tomb was built of stones and covered with tiles. A. A. Karakhmedova, who carried out archaeological excavations, without specifying a date, referred these tombs to the period of the early Middle Ages (Karakhmedova 1990, p. 37).

In one of the chapels which is part of the Yeddy Kilse monastery complex, there were two tombs of relatively small sizes near the northern and southern walls at a distance of 0.90 m

from each other. They were composed of small river stones using clay mortar. The burial chambers were two-layered. The upper chamber of one, which was rectangular in layout, had a gabled roof constructed from large flat river stones. This chamber was found in a dilapidated state. Its length was 2.80 m, the width was 1 m, the height was 0.90 m, and the wall thickness was 0.30 – 0.35 m. The tomb was oriented in an east-west direction. The skeletal remains did not survive. The upper chamber of the other tomb is also rectangular in plan, and is oval inside. It is built of small river stones using a lime mortar. Judging by its size (1.16×0.84 m), this chamber was designed for a child's burial. It was discovered in a very ruined state. From the outside, the chamber survived to a height of 0.75 m. The wall thickness was 0.14–0.46 m. The skeleton did not survive. In the lower chamber of this tomb, remains of human bones were located in a disordered state. The chapel where these tombs were located was attributed to the period of the early Middle Ages (Karakhmedova 1990, p. 39). Similar stone tombs were also found in the Kish church (Kerimov and Sturfiel 2003) (Figs. 49, 50).

Stone sarcophagi. Burials of this type were found in the monuments of Gyavurkala, Beshikdag, Ustajan-tepe (Gabala District), and Zyumyurkhach (Barda District). They were closed with lids and differed from each other mainly in size. In the discovered sarcophagi, grave goods were absent.

In some cases, the Gyavurkala sarcophagi were located far beyond the borders of the cemeteries. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that these memorials, being the expensive creations, requiring much time and work, and were intended for the wealthy (Göyüşov 1984, p. 113). The burial of the brother of the king of Albania, Grigor-Hamam, placed in one of the stone sarcophagi at Gyavurkala, confirms this theory. The length of one of the Gyavurkala sarcophagi is 1.83 m, 0.66 m in width, and 0.63 m in height. In these sarcophagi, the deceased were laid on their back, their hands were on their abdomens. In all these sarcophagi tombs, there were only one body interred, with the exception of sarcophagus No. 7, where a double burial was placed.

Fig. 49. Kish. Stone tomb

The sarcophagi of Ustajan-tepe (Gabala District) are distinguished by relatively large dimensions. One

Fig. 50. Kish. Stone tomb

of them had measured 2.26×0.82×1.05 m. The thickness of its walls were 0.12 m. Hearths were uncovered near the sarcophagi. This fact gave rise to the opinion that these monuments could be associated with Zoroastrianism (Gadirov 1986, p. 44). Judging by their length, however, they were intended for the burial of the deceased in a stretched-out position. Note that Masudi wrote in 943 that, though the population of the city of Gabala were Muslims, the inhabitants of the surrounding villages were Christians (Minorsky 1963, p. 211). In contrast, there is no data on the presence of Zoroastrians in this region. Some sarcophagi were located inside a rectangular structure with tiles overlapping each other forming a vault. Considering the form of the tiles, the funerary monuments of Ustajan-tepe were dated no later than the 7th century (Gadirov 1986, p. 44).

The limestone sarcophagus from Besikdag has a length of 2.12 m, a width of 0.66 m, and a height of 0.70 m. The sarcophagus was closed with a gable roof with monolithic handles. The section of the sarcophagus where the head would have been laid was at the western end. Within the sarcophagus were the remains of a human skeleton. The discovery of this funerary monument near the Beshikdag church allows attributing it to the time of the construction of this Christian religious building. It was noted above that, in Beshikdag, the church was built in the 6th–7th centuries (Yampolski 1960, p. 249; Mamedova 2004, p. 80).

The sarcophagus from Zyumyurkhach is noticeably small in size in comparison to other funerary monuments of this type. The length of this sarcophagus, made of white limestone, measured 0.90 m, its width is 0.62 m, the height is, 0.48 m, and the thickness of its side walls were 8.5 cm, with the foundations being11 cm at the lowest level. The sarcophagus was closed with a gable roof. Judging by the size, it was intended for a child's burial. This memorial is dated to the 9th-10th centuries (Narimanov and Rustamov 1965, p. 200).

Rock tombs. These funerary monuments have so far been discovered only in Bozdag. These tombs were hollowed out of the living rock. Based on some materials uncovered in the burials, they should be dated to around the 8th century (Göyüşov and Guliyev 1971, p. 19; Göyüşov 1984, p. 99).

Burials of historical figures of Albania. The setting of the burial sites for famous people of the ancient era and the period of the early Middle Ages, who played an important role in the history of a country, are a rather rare phenomenon in the archaeological world practice.

Martyrium of St. Grigoris. Grigoris, after his martyrdom in 337, was venerated as a saint by the Albanian church; from the age of 15 he was the leader of the Albanian church. He was killed by order of the king of the Masguts and the Huns of Sanesan. The *History of the Albanians* indicates that Grigoris was buried in the Albanian town of Amaras, near the church, established by St. Gregory the Illuminator – Grigoris's grandfather (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: 14, 20).

In the early 6th century, King Vachagan III of Albania, "having taken off his outer clothing he picked up a spade" and personally participated in the search for the grave of St. Grigoris and, along with the Queen Shushanika who "carried the earth", they found the location of his burial, and they built a martyrium and a chapel above it in the name of St. Grigoris (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 23) This structure stands to this day in Amaras (Nagorno-Karabakh). The martyrium (Figs. 18.5–6), built in a quadrangular layout, with a length of 3.10 m and a width of 2.10 m, is small in size in comparison with the church of St. Grigoris above. The eastern wall of martyrium served as a kind of foundation for the eastern wall of the upper church. Due to the fact that the church extended westward beyond the limits of the martyrium, the entrance (into the martyrium) was built not on the western side, but in the eastern. It was possible to reach it going down the stone steps located on both sides of the altar. These narrow steps, which can accommodate only one person, on the one hand, leads first to the north, then it turns east before leading to a small platform. Here the steps again go north and enter the bema. There are niches in the western and northern walls of the bema. The walls of the western niche are decorated with various geometric and vegetal ornamentations. The floor of the altar is paved with stones. There is an epitaph carved on one of the steps: "This grave belongs to the saint and clever Grigoris" (Göyüşov 1975, pp. 54, 85). During the time of Grigoris, the ancient Armenian alphabet was not yet formed. In addition, there are intervals in the inscription, which indicates a much later origin of this epitaph (Göyüşov 1975, p. 54). According to the *History of the Albanians*, on the grave of Grigoris "there was made no memorial..., because it was feared that someone would take away the relics of the saint" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 20). In 1968 R. B. Göyüşov conducted archaeological excavations here and uncovered in a round-shape wooden container; within was a skull and the arms and leg bones of a person. According to one publication it was found at a depth of 4 m (Göyüşov 1970), but 5.20 m according to another (Göyüşov 1975, p. 53). Thus, R. B. Göyüşov claimed he found the site of the secondary burial place of Grigoris (Göyüşov 1975, p. 54). The *History of the Albanians* stated that "the king sat on the ground at the grave of the saint... the priest, taking out the relics, gathered them into a vessel that the king held in his arms" ; in other words, the remains of Grigoris were already disturbed (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 23). Then the

king ordered to give a piece of the holy relics to each bishop so they could distribute them in their dioceses (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 23).

Tomb of the King of Albania Vachagan III. On the edge of the entrance to one of the chapels in the monastery complex of St. Elisha, there is an inscription carved in 1286: "King Vachagan repents here" (Mnatsakanyan 1969, pp. 90, 194). Indeed, in the chapel there is a grave without an epitaph. The smoothly polished gravestone has a triangular shape. A stone cross is installed next to this stone (Mamedova 2004, p. 145). On the outer surface of the wall of the chapel there is a depiction of a horseman, which is supposedly identified with the image of Vachagan III the Blessed (Göyüşov 1984, p. 98).

The Grave of the Brother of the King of Albania, Grigor-Hamam. On the gable lid of one stone sarcophagus, found on the site of Gyavurkala, there is an epitaph carved in four lines: "This (the grave... of a brother) of Prince Hamam and Prince Filip and Prince Snpat... robbed of his youth, left the world, left a bitter note (grief) in this inscription. Those who dare to disturb the peace, cursed be them by the God Christ" (Mnatsakanyan 1969, p. 162). This lid has a length of 1.77 m, a width of 0.61 m, and a height of 0.28 m (Vahidov 1965, p. 177, Fig. 7). The sarcophagus itself has not survived. The inscription indicates that the brother of the king of Albania, Grigor-Hamam, was buried in this sarcophagus. From the *History of the Albanians*, it is known that Grigor-Hamam, who restored the Albanian state in 885, personally killed his brother (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: 21). Judging by the epitaph, it was carved on behalf of Grigor-Hamam and his brothers Filip (Philip) and Snpat (Smbat). The name of the murdered brother is not mentioned or preserved.

The Grave of Petros – Bishop of the Amaras Diocese. Scientific literature provides little information about this burial. It is only known that, according to the epitaph, over the grave of Petros, a stone cross was erected in 977, which has survived to our days (Göyüşov 1984, p. 126).

The Tomb of Khurs of Gardman. According to M. Barkhudaryan (in 1895), in the area of the village of Khachbulag (now Khoshbulag) of the Dashkesan District there is a holy place (sanctuary), which was considered the tomb of Khurs of Gardman (Yampolsky 1961, p. 41). According to Z. I. Yampolsky, he was referring to Khurs, who ruled in the 5th century in the Principality of Gardman (Yampolsky 1961, p. 253). In the *History of the Albanians* it is said that the ancient Armenian educator Mesrop Mashtots "having heard that there was still a pagan sect in Gardman, ... came to Khurs, the ruler of Gardman, and with his help he converted them to the faith... At the same time appeared the cursed Nestorius, damned in Ephesus by two hundred fathers" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 3). It is known that Nestorius was elected patriarch of Constantinople in 428, and the Council of Ephesus was held in 431. This means that the meeting between Mashtots and Khurs could have taken place in either 428 or between the years 428 and 431. The population of Gardman, the historical region of Albania, at that time still adhered to a polytheistic ideology. According to the information collected by M. Barkhudaryan, Khurs was a Zoroastrian (Yampolsky

1961, p. 41). Thus, it turns out that Khurs and his subjects before the arrival of Mashtots were Zoroastrians – and polytheists. After his death, Khurs was buried as a Christian, and his grave later became the sanctuary of the modern village of Khachbulag.

The Grave of the Martyr Takugi. From the *History of the Albanians* it is known that Takugi came "from the region of Utiyev, from the native nobles, from the village of Bagratuniyev, who were very rich" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 29). She was among the Christians captured by the Huns during their campaign in the South Caucasus in 452 (Khalilov 2011, p. 68). Prisoners were kept on a hill in the Grand Kunenke (Artsakh), and there Takugi's head was cut off (*Aghvan History* 1861, I: p. 29). In the *History of the Albanians* it was reported: "Everyone clearly saw that strong light came from the place where Saint Takugi died ... For a long time, a star-like light appeared in that place and shone over the holy martyrs. Seeing this, many people call this place the 'Hill of the Star' to this day" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 29). In 1895, M. Barkhudaryan identified this "Hill of the Star" on the banks of the Terter-Chai River in Nagorno-Karabakh and marked it as a "great shrine" (Yampolsky 1961, p. 202). He further reported that on the hill there was a chapel of an old building with a pointed arch, wherein was the grave of Takugi (Yampolsky 1961, p. 202).

There was an attempt made to declare an early inlet burial in the Uch-Tepe kurgan (Agjabadi District) as the burial place of the Grand Duke of Albania, Jevanshir (Narimanov 2001). However, the rich funerary grave goods, as well as the Mongoloid features revealed by anthropological studies of the skull (Ginzburg 1965), do not provide a basis for identifying the skeleton with Jevanshir, a Christian from the Mihranid Dynasty of Iranian origin. It is also highly questionable that the human bones found in 2007 in the Khudavank Monastery complex (Kelbajar District) as a result of illegal archaeological excavations are the remains of Dadi, a disciple of the Apostle Thaddaeus – as some media sources had reported.[3] From medieval sources it is known that the apostle Thaddaeus was buried in Artaz (Kirakos Gandzaketsi 1976, pp. 201–202), identified by Armenian researchers south of the Araks river (Manandyan 1954, pp. 53, 160, 161, 163). Admittedly, Dadi could be buried in the monastery named after him – Dadivank. However, the absence of epitaphs in this case and the possibility of identifying other burials here dated to a later period, render the opinion of Armenian archaeologists as unfounded hypotheses.

In some funerary sites of Albania (Mingachevir, Gabala, Gyavurkala and others), along with Christian burials, there are pagan ones. This means that in a number of settlements in Albania, Christians and idolaters lived together, which is confirmed by the *History of the Albanians*. This source reported that part of the population of the capital Albanian city of Partav at the beginning of the 7th century was pagan (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II: p. 10). Types of funerary practices – such as ground burials, stone coffins, stone tombs, catacombs – were characteristics of both earlier pagans and Christians. Burial chambers built of mud bricks, fired brick tombs, stone sarcophagi, rock tombs in the early Middle Ages were

[3] www.regnum.ru/news/864172.html

included in the funeral practice of Christians only. If burial chambers constructed from mud bricks, stone coffins, catacombs and ground burials were recorded in the ancient period among the Albanians and entered the Christian culture in the early Middle Ages, then tombs built of fired bricks, stone sarcophagi, as well as rock tombs for Albanian culture was an innovation. It is possible that Christian missionaries from Asia Minor played a certain role in the spread of these types of burials in the territory of Albania.

Anthropological study of 25 skulls (18 male and 7 female) from the Christian burials of Mingachevir of the 7th–9th centuries showed that they belong to the brachycranial type and are clearly different from the skulls found in the Late Antique catacombs. This is to be expected since the catacomb burial was an external burial type. After examining the skulls, it was noticed that those Christian skulls from Mingachevir and the Muslim skulls of the 14th–17th centuries from the neighboring Samukh District are of the same type, and in general the size of Christian skulls correspond to the size of the head of the modern population of North-West Azerbaijan, which includes Mingachevir (Kasimova 1960, pp. 62–69, 72–74, 86). This indicates a genetic connection between generations, as well as a change in the religious orientation of the population in this region.

Cult items. The cross as a symbol of Christianity is mentioned in Albania for the first time in connection with the burial of St. Grigoris in Amaras. In the History of the Albanians it is noted that a small mound was laid over the grave of Grigoris, on which a cross was erected (History of Aghvan 1861, I: p. 21). Based on this, it can be argued that in Albania the cross was first mounted on graves and used as a Christian symbol as early as 337. The History of the Albanians reports that in the 5th–6th centuries, during the reign of King Vachagan III, they used golden and silver crosses decorated with precious stones in Albania (History of Aghvan 1861, I: pp. 19, 21). The name of Vachagan III was engraved on one of these golden crosses (History of Aghvan 1861, I: p. 19).

Archaeological research conducted on Christian monuments of Albania revealed crosses made of metal, stone, ceramics, as well as those carved on boulders, on the walls of religious buildings, and funerary chambers, as well as on various ritualistic objects. In Mingachevir there are almost all types of crosses known in the territory of Albania (Fig. 51). Out of 30 crosses of Mingachevir, there is only one made of bronze (Fig. 51, 7), the rest are iron (Vahidov 1961, p. 105). Based on the fact that all these finds were found in structure known as Church IV, they are dated to the same time period – to the 8th century. This factor does not yet allow the determination of chronological classification of crosses from Albania. Admittedly, R. M. Vahidov considered the possible use of the crosses of earlier Mingachevir sanctuaries in the new churches after the earlier ones were destroyed, thus explaining why there is an absence of crosses in earlier churches (Vahidov 1961, p. 105). Outside the church site, in other places of settlements (Nos. 2 and 3) of Mingachevir along with the iron cross, there were two ceramic crosses. The image of the cross in Mingachevir was also carved on stone, on a household jug, and on clay candlesticks intended for use in religious rites

(Vahidov 1961, pp. 106, 108, Figs. 30-31). The length of the iron crosses is 7–35 cm, the thickness is 0.8–2 cm (Vahidov 1961, p. 105; Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, pp. 85, 94). R. M. Vahidov divided the crosses from Mingachevir into 3 groups according to their method of use: 1) the crosses that were held in the hands; 2) crosses for placing on other objects; 3) crosses worn on the neck (Vahidov 1961, p. 105).

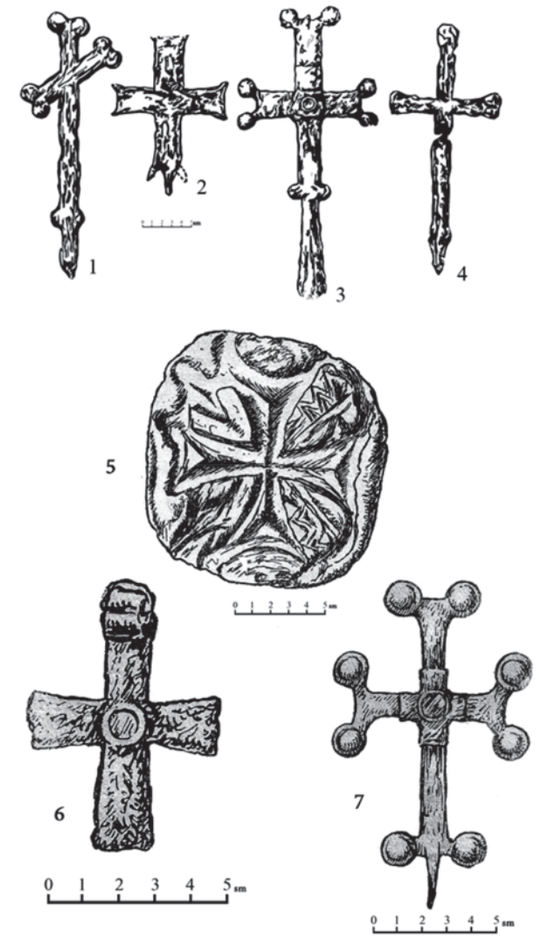

Fig. 51. Mingachevir. Crosses: 1–4. Iron; 5. Stone; 6. Iron; 7. Bronze

By the first millennium AD, there were seven types of crosses, based on shape, in Albania dating:

1. *Equal-arm Crosses.*[4] Similar crosses were carved on stone from the settlement of Sygnag (Göyüşov 1984, p. 101), on the outer surface of the wall of the Gyavurkala church (Fig. 52.*3*) and the stones found there on a stone from the church of Mingachevir (Vahidov 1965, p. 173–175, Fig. 5; Vahidov 1961, p. 106, Fig. 30; Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 94, fig. 18 on p. 96). A stone cross, made in this manner, was found in at the Upper Chiryurt site (Dagestan) (Fig. 52.*1*). One group of iron crosses Mingachevir (Figs. 51.*2, 6*) also refers to this type (Vahidov 1961, p. 106, Figs. 29 q, d). The artifact specialists first considered the stone with a carved cross from Mingachevir (Fig. 51.*5*) as a special mold for casting metal crosses then later identified it as stone that fell from the wall (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 94; Vahidov 1961, p. 106). The arms of crosses were carved on stones from Mingachevir, Sygnag, Gyavurkala, having a triangular shape; in contrast the corresponding arms of iron crosses from Mingachevir were quadrangular (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 5.17 b). This fact indicates that perhaps that stone with a carved cross from Mingachevir was not really used as a mold for casting. A loop at the end of the upper arm of one of the Mingachevir iron crosses (Fig. 51.*6*) is decorated with

[4] [In English-language publications, these are commonly called “Greek Crosses”, which is a misnomer].

a glass insert within a bronze frame (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 5), serves as confirmation that some of these were worn as necklaces. Three spikes at the end of the lower arm of another Mingachevir iron cross indicate that this cross (Fig. 51.*2*) was intended for mounting (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 17 b).

2. *Crosses with Paired Rounded Terminal Ends of the arms.*[5] One bronze cross of this type was found in Mingachevir (Fig. 51.*7*) (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 15). Another similar cross was carved on a cross stone, discovered near the church of St. Elisha (Göyüşov 1984, p. 101). The arms of these crosses usually have different lengths. For example, if the length of each of the side arm of the bronze cross was 4 cm, then the length of the upper arm was 5 cm, and the bottom arm was 7 cm (Vahidov 1961, p. 105; Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, p. 93). Each arm has a width of 1 cm and a thickness of 2 mm. The cross is decorated with a green glass insert at the crossing of the arms. A sharp spike at the end of the lower arm indicates that this cross was intended for installation.
3. *Cross with Paired Rounded Terminal Ends on Three of the Four Arms.* An iron cross of this type was found in Mingachevir (Fig. 51.*3*) (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 17c). Between the bottom arm and the socket of the cross, there is a short horizontal bar . There is glass insert at the crossing which adorns the object.
4. Crosses with a Slanting Crossbar. An iron cross of this type was discovered in Mingechavir (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, Fig. 17a). This cross (Fig. 51.1) terminates in rounded forms, at each corner of the upper and side arms. The lower arm, separated from the handle by a short crossbeam, is longer than the other arms.
5. *Crosses with Quadrangular Arms (the bottom arm is longer than the rest).* Crosses of a similar type were found in Mingachevir (Fig. 51.*4*) (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951. Fig. 17 g). The shape of the bottom arm indicates that such crosses were also intended for mounting.
6. Crosses with rectangular arms and a crossbeam. A nacreous cross of this type, dated to the 9th–11th centuries, was included in the burial inventory of one of the burials in the Kish Church (Fig. 52.*4*) (Karimov and Sturfiel 2003, pp. 95, 97, Ill. 4, Section on "Jewelry").
7. "*Flowering" Crosses*. At the end of the arms of these crosses of this type there are three or more petals. Such crosses are characteristic mainly of cross stones (Helilov and Nyitray 2008, pp. 206, 207; Helilov and Nyitray 2011, pp. 31, 71). Similar metal cross with three petals at the ends were found on the Shamkir ancient settlement (Fig. 52.*2*) (*Orta əsr Şəmkir şəhər yeri* 2010, p. 211). It is interesting to note that the cross "carved on four sides like a lily" was included in the composition of a large cross made by the Albanian bishop Israel for the Huns in 682 (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II. p. 41). Israel also adorned this large cross "with various drawings and stuck to it the images of animals taken with careful fidelity..." (*History of Aghvan* 1861, II. p. 41).

[5] [In European heraldry, the rounded terminal ends are called "buttons" or classified as *boutonné*].

Because there were many different types of crosses found on Christian monuments throughout Albania and the South Caucasus, we must conclude there was not one predominant type. Thus, perhaps such a "national" cross did not exist (Vahidov 1961, p. 107; Helilov and Nyitray 2008, p. 207; Göyüşov 1984, p. 101; Ramishvili 2003, Tabs. 119 / 1–7, 120/3, 5, 8, 9, 121/1, 2, 4, 5; Arakelyan 2003, Tabs. 141/5, 142/10, 143/10, 15, 23, 160/2, 4).

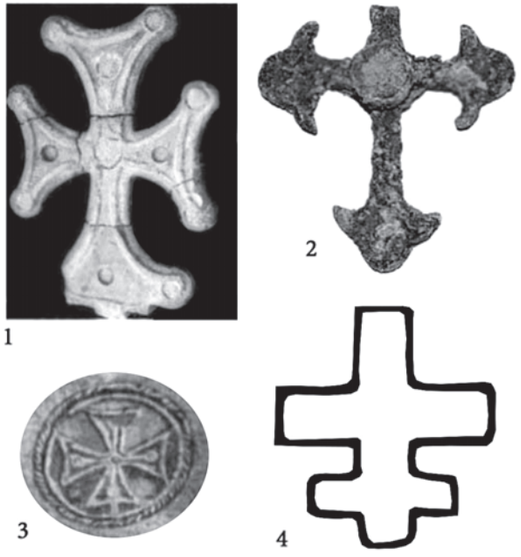

Fig. 52. Crosses: 1. Upper Chiryurt (Dagestan, Russia); 2. Shamkir; 3. Gyavur-Kala; 4. Kish

Stone Crosses. These were monuments that signified a new type of Christian culture in the South Caucasus. Usually, in their design, the crossing of the arms was provided with an ornamental frame. On the surface of a number of stone crosses, there were additional religious and secular symbols. The Armenian word "khachkar" used in relation to these monuments has a rather late origin. In many medieval Armenian-language epigraphic materials, these cult objects are indicated by the word "nishan", which is also included in the vocabulary of the Azerbaijani language, translated from the Persian as "mark" (Göyüşov 1968, p. 38). According to experts, the stone crosses that appeared for the first time in the 9th century, which were usually carved only on the front side, were replaced by tetrahedral columns – memorials of the early Middle Ages (Arakelyan 2003, p. 344). The *History of the Albanians* mentions a similar pillar, which the Albanian king Vachagan III "erected in the ditch of the martyr Elisha," that is, at the site of the death of St. Elisha in the Gomenk region of Nagorno-Karabakh (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: pp. 6, 7). The stone crosses had different purposes: they were erected as a sign of blessing or good wishes to people during their lifetime or after death and commemorated construction, economic activity, military-political events, as well as an apotropaic device to prevent (or dispel) natural disasters, etc. (Arakelyan 2003, p. 344).

Albanian stone crosses have not yet been generally studied. Judging by the inscriptions, the earliest cross stone in Albania were erected in 853/4 on behalf of Solomon, the Albanian bishop of Great Arran (Mnatsakanyan 1969, p. 57). So far, the first stone cross erected in Albania in memory of a deceased person, can be considered the stone cross of 977, dedicated to Petros, the Albanian bishop of Amaras, which was set on the grave of this religious figure, according to R. B. Göyüşov (1984, p. 126).

Fig. 53. Shamkir. Fragments of a Stone Cross

One stone cross found in the ancient settlement of Shamkir (Fig. 53) was framed by an interlace motif, formed by two curvilinear ribbons. Judging by the surrounding materials, this stone cross was discovered in a stratigraphic layer dating to the 9th–10th centuries (*Orta əsr Şəmkir şəhər yeri*, 2010, p. 234). This ornament was widespread in Late Antique and medieval Christian monuments (Göyüşov 1968, p. 38–39; Khelilov and Nyitray 2008, pp. 206–214; Khelilov and Nyitray 2010). The area that contains Christian monuments with similar ornamentation in the early 11th century crossed the boundaries of modern nations and the geographical boundaries of the Caucasus, reaching as far as distant Hungary (Fig. 54.*4*) (Khelilov and Nyitray 2008, p. 206). The Shamkir stone cross can be dated to the 10th century.

Out of the fourteen stone crosses found in the village of Sygnag on the territory of the village of Janyatag (Nagorno-Karabakh), only one indicates a date corresponding to 1165/6 (Göyüşov 1968, p. 42). There is an interesting stone cross (Fig. 55), which is dated by R. B. Göyüşov to the 8th–9th centuries; however, given the general consensus when scholars theorize when stone cross first appeared should be dated no earlier than the 9th century and, most likely made in the 10th–11th centuries (Göyüşov 1968, pp. 42–43). The composition of this stone cross consists of symbols of both a secular and religious character. The stone crosses of Nagorno-Karabakh with secular symbols are considered quite rare examples of such monuments in the South Caucasus (Göyüşov 1968, pp. 38, 42). This Sygnag cross is made of limestone. The height of its preserved fragment is 0.96 m, its width is 0.60 m, and its thickness is 0.13–0.14 m. The edges of the stone cross are framed by double weave interlace ornamentation. The cross, two men, a woman, a bird and two geometric forms are displayed on the central part of the surface of the stone cross.

The edges of another cross stone found near the church in Beshikdag (Fig. 54.*3*) are also framed with double-weave interlace ornamentation. In addition to this decor and a cross, four archaic symbols are carved on its surface (Yampolsky 1960, Figs. 1, 7). Considering these symbols (Fig. 54.*2*), it is suggested that this ritual object from Beshikdag was likely made no later than the 10th century.

The cross stone discovered in the territory of the village of Tatlı (Agstafa District) is notable for its intricately carved graphic design (Fig. 54.*1*). On its surface there is a cross and two winged-angels on both sides. The angels hovering in the air are arranged as pendants to each other. They rest with one hand on the upper arm of the cross, with the other hand – on the corresponding side arm. The bottom arm is flanked by a plant with leaves. The stone cross from Tatlı was dated to the 8th–10th centuries (Nuriyev 2009, p. 181, Fig. 79). This stone cross's internal design resembles a cross depicted on the wall of the church of the 8th–9th centuries in Gyavurkala. The images of the plant on the cross stones from Tatlı and Syuni (Sisakan) of the 9th century are similar to each other (Akhundov 1986, p. 249. Figs. 283–284). Considering this, the cross stone from Tatlı can be attributed to the 9th century.

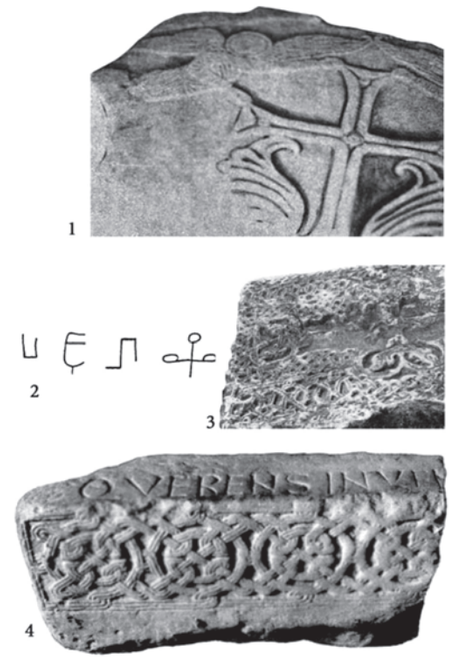

Fig. 54. Stone Crosses: 1. Tatlı ; 2. Symbols on the stone cross from Beshikdag; 3. Beshikdag; 4. Ornament ("interlace ribbon") carved on the stone (early 11th century, Hungary)

The next group of religious objects is represented by censers, that was used in burning incense. The *History of the Albanians* described the use of such objects in Albania during the reign of King Vachagan III (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: pp. 21, 23). Incense could be obtained in Albania itself (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 5). Archaeological excavations in Mingachevir on the site of Church IV, revealed various parts of two bronze censers (Fig. 56.*1*) (Vahidov and Fomenko 1951, pp. 94–95, Fig. 16). One of them was found at the altar area of the church, the other one was found on the floor of a secondary room. Judging by the fragments, the main part of the censer was a small bowl-shaped disk suspended on three chains. Apart from this, the censer ensemble included diamond-shaped metal plates, also suspended on chains, and long straight rods, the ends of which were bent in the shape of a hook (Vahidov 1961, p. 109).

These censers, as well as the church, dated back to the 8th century. Another example of a metal censer was discovered during archaeological research on the site of Gabala (Fig. 56.*2*) (Qazıyev 1965, pp. 153, 158 Table III, plate 4). Only a handle in the form of a bird with the image of a cross on the bottom had survived. The necessary attributes of Christian rites were clay *candlesticks*. These early medieval objects were found in Mingachevir, near the church site of the settlement No. 2. They are made by hand, have a height of 10–18 cm (Göyüşov 1984, p. 119). On the surface of candlesticks of various shapes (truncated cone,

Fig. 55. Sygnag. Stone Cross

truncated pyramid), there are Albanian writings (Figs. 8–9), as well as diverse images of an equal-ended cross: made by lines or dots in a quadrangle (Vahidov 1961, p. 46. Figs. 31 a, b; Göyüşov 1984, pp. 119–120).

Seals were used to certify church documents. In the *History of Albanians*, it mentions how such seals were used. For example, during the Church Councils at Aghuen (end of the 5th century) and Partav (703–4), the resulting documents included a list of the church officials who "put their hands to this prescription" and "put a seal on this charter" and "it was sealed by our will with the signet-rings of those mentioned above" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, I: p. 26, III: p. 8).

One of these stone seals is kept in France at the Paris National Library. This gem is made with the intaglio technique. The impression has dimensions measuring 20×22 mm. The following design is displayed on its convex surface: a cross rests above a globe; a crescent moon is on the left side of the cross; a six-pointed star [or the sun] is on the right side of the cross. A Persian Pehlevi (Pahlavi) inscription can be translated as "The Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasakan" (Kasumova 2005, pp. 48–50). As early as from the year 551/2, the Albanian Catholicos had the title of "Catholicos of Albania, Lpinia and Chola" (*History of Aghvan* 1861, III: 23), S. Y. Kasumova attributes this gem to the last quarter of the 5th to the first half of the 6th centuries (Kasumova 2005, p. 50).

On some agate seals of small sizes, as well as on the glass shield of a bronze ring of the 5th–7th centuries, discovered in Mingachevir (Fig. 2.*4*), there is a depiction of an equilateral cross (Vahidov 1961, p. 65, Table XIII.12; Göyüşov 1984, pp. 100, 121). Another bronze ring with the image of an equilateral cross was discovered in the early medieval funerary monument of the Enykh (modern Anig) in the Kusar District (Fig. 2.*3*) (Khalilov 1965a, p. 177).

A handmade clay seal was discovered in the early medieval settlement of Kalagyakh in the territory of Ismayilli District. It was well-fired and reddish in color. The diameter of its front side is 6 cm. The seal has an arcuate handle. On the surface of the seal there are two circles, between which crosses are depicted, forming a framing scene of the crucifixion

of Christ. Above Christ's head there is an equilateral cross. On the left side of the cross there is a crescent moon and below is an image of a tree. The Kalagyakh seal is dated to the 8th century (Göyüşov 1984, p. 120. Tab. XXI.3).

An early medieval bone pin, in the form of a hand, was discovered in Mingachevir. Perhaps their represents gestures used during church services (Vahidov 1961, Table XIII, 3). Because of the arrangement of the fingers, it resembles a hand that is providing blessing. In the opinion of R. B. Göyüşov, this pin could have decorated a priest's clothes or served as a cover for a cross (Göyüşov1984, p. 121).

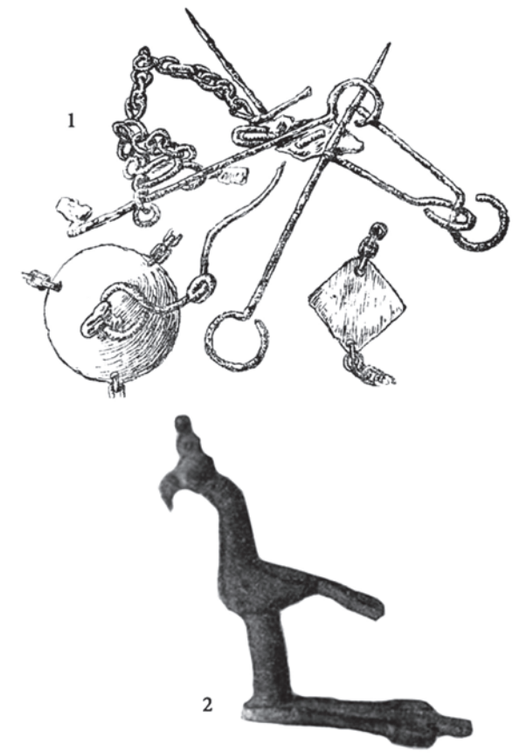

Fig. 56. Censers: 1 Mingachevir; 2 Gabala

An interesting copper plate with a stamped image was discovered in Barda. On the top of the plate, which has a cruciform shape, there is a depiction of Christ over a throne. One on arm, there is a representation of an unidentifiable animal's head; priests are also depicted on the arms. The main part of the plate has a square shape; within it is a depiction of an equestrian St. George "the Victorious", piercing a dragon with a spear. This composition is framed by images of bushy plants. R. B. Göyüşov assumed that this was an imported product, since below the image of Christ there is partially erased inscription made with letters that resemble Latin (Göyüşov 1984, p. 121, Tab. XXI).

Another image of St. George, carved on an alabaster plate, was documented in the third room of the Church IV in Mingachevir (Fig. 19.*2*). According to R. M. Vahidov, this image adorned one of the walls (Vahidov 1961, pp. 115–116, Fig. 35). Along with the church, it dates back to the 8th century.

A unique find was recorded in the settlement of Sandygtepe I on the territory of the Guba District. Archaeological excavations in one of the rubbish pits of the 10th–11th centuries revealed a fragment of the skull of a child under two years of age (Fig. 57) near the fragments of medieval ceramics. No other bones were found. This fragment has a length of 8.5 cm and a height of 5.5 cm. Judging by the remains of wooden and iron nails, it was stored in a special box. Two parallel zigzag lines of ornamentation (a meander pattern) are depicted on the skull with black paint, possibly plant-based. Between the meanders above the eye sockets there is

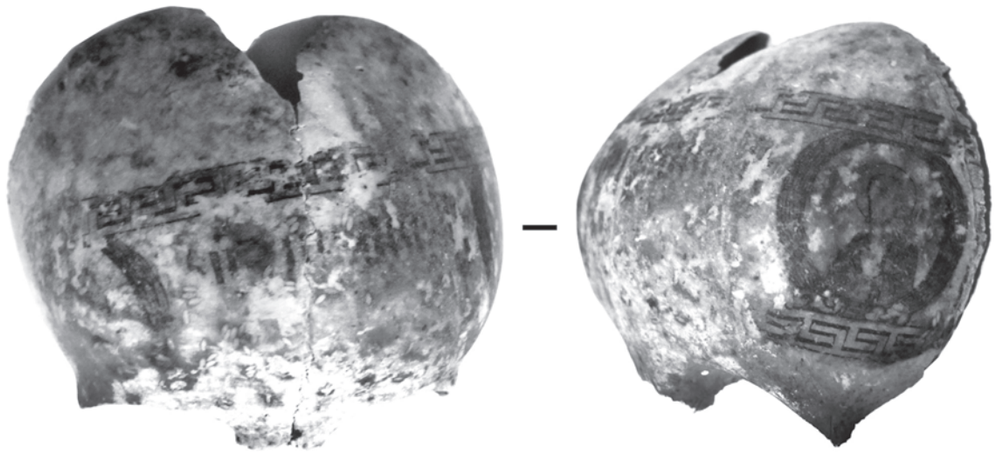

Fig. 57. Fragment of a skull (holy relics). Sandygtepe I

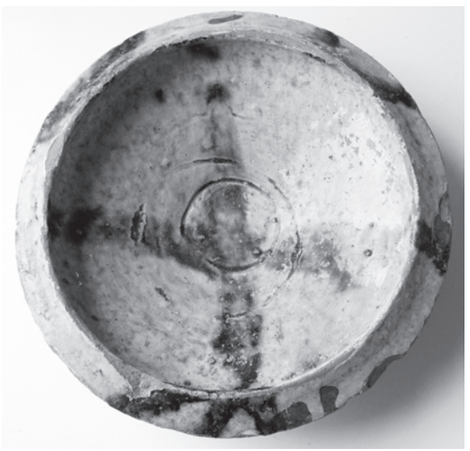

Fig. 58. Ceramic dish with the image of a simple cross. Sandygtepe I

an image of Christian saints framed by wreaths. Between these images on the forehead there is a short, rather faded undeciphered inscription. Most likely, this child was born with a special sign that turned his remains into holy relics. It is possible that a small Christian community lived in this settlement, which consisted of at least one family, because of these features: several ceramic vessels with the image of a cross were revealed in the settlement (Fig. 58), as well as several graves in wooden coffins in the burial grounds, where the deceased were laid on their back with outstretched arms and legs, with the head at the western end, without accompanying funerary goods (Khalilov 2015, pp. 263, 265, Figs. 4/3, 9/1, 2).

Christianity in Azerbaijan. 11th–21st centuries

N. A. Alyshov (Azerbaijan)

The population of Caucasian Albania – one of the ancient states of Azerbaijan – during different periods had a number of beliefs. In prehistoric times they worshiped the natural elements, such as the sun, the moon, flora and fauna, fire; in historical times, their religions were based on paganism, and later, they adopted Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The recognition and official adoption of Christianity by the state of Caucasian Albania took place almost simultaneously with the Roman Empire. After the publication of the Edict of Milan in the Roman Empire in 313, proclaiming Christianity an independent religion, the Albanian king Urnair recognized Christianity in 314. The decree according to which Christianity became the state religion in the Roman Empire was acknowledged in 325 in Nicaea, and already in 326 when a similar decision was made in the Albanian state.

In the 7th century, however, the Arab conquests stopped the development of Christianity in the lowlands of Caucasian Albania. Thus, in the 8th century, due to the weakening of centralized power in Albania, within the framework of its state borders, heirs of Albanian statehood and adherents of its Christian heritage were subsequently replaced by other regimes: Kambisen (Eretia of the 8th–11th centuries), the Principality of Syunik (11th–12th centuries), and the Khachen-Albanian Principality (12th–15th centuries). In the 15th–19th centuries these principalities (*melikdoms*) also supervised the functions of the religious leadership of the Albanian Catholicosate. Because of this dependence of the church system on the Albanian state, the Arab conquerors did not allow missionaries to control its entire territory. So, at first, the Arabs, being content with the conquest of mostly flat lands, were satisfied with receiving *jizya* (*jana*) – a head tax from the Albanian Christian population in the mountain territories.

After the conquest of the Sasanian Empire, the Arab Caliphate began to support the Monophysite doctrine of Christianity, which led to a complicated situation in the region. After the assassination of the Albanian prince Javanshir in 681 and the death of the Catholicos Saint Eliezer in 687, the former Bishop of Gardman, Nerses Bakur (who held Dyophysitism), was forced to accept Monophysitism by political pressure, after which he was elected Catholicos

of Albania in 687. After 14 years, Nerses Bakur, having reached a secret agreement with the princess Sprama (wife of the Albanian prince Varaz-Tiridates), reconverted the country into Dyophysitism. The change of direction was marked by the demolition of church altars, which Nerses Bakur especially promoted. Princess Sprama, with the support of the nobility, helped Nerses to destroy altars in many churches (Kalankatuklu 2006, pp. 186–187). This revealed clear difference between the Dyophysite and the Monophysite churches, which was associated with altars.

In Dyophysite churches, the bema was redesigned so that the altar was placed 50 cm or less above the floor level and demarcated by a chancel screen. Thus, the actions of priests within the bema are hidden from the sight of the worshipers in the church. In contrast, the altar of the Monophysite churches were between 70 cm to one meter above the floor level. They are different from the Dyophysite churches in that the bema is open for the parishioners to see all the actions of priests within. During archaeological research in Azerbaijan, there were revealed many Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania, which reflected variations associated with a change in the direction of religious practice.

Nerses Bakur decided to return to Dyophysitism because in 699 the Albanian king Varaz-Tiridates I and his sons were captured during negotiations over tax cuts with the Byzantine emperor. In order to free them, Princess Sprama, having agreed with the Catholicos Nerses Bakur, the Albanian nobility and bishops, changed the direction of the Albanian church to conform with the teachings and practices of the Byzantine Empire (Khalilov 2011, p. 55). This reorganization was the reason why Nerses Bakur was ousted from the throne in 701 by order of the Caliph Abd al-Malik. After Nerses, the entire Albanian feudal nobility, led by Prince Shero, who worshiped the dual nature of Jesus (Dyophysitism), was forced to recede from this practice under pain of death by Caliph Abd al-Malik (Kalankatuklu 2006, pp. 187–193). However, this process was not permanent and continued until the end of the 9th century – when the Arab Umayyad Caliphate was in decline.

If at that time, between the seventh and ninth centuries, the Albanian Catholicosate had fully accepted Monophysitism, then there would be no need for it to have been turned into a diocese of the Monophysite Armenian Church by decree of the Russian Tsar Nicholas I after 12 centuries in 1836. The famous Russian historian and ethnographer V. L. Velichko wrote that until the early 19th century, the Aghvan or Hanzasar Catholicosate was separate, which functioned independently and was a rival to the Church of Etchmiadzin (Velichko 1990, p. 66).

In 704, after the formation of the Dyophysite-Monophysite church union at the Partav Council, Shero (who was the main initiator) took advantage of the imprisonment of King Varaz-Tiridates I in the Byzantine Empire and seized power until 705. In the fifth year of his Byzantine captivity, Varaz-Tiridates was released and returned to his country. After that, he subjugated the country to the Arabs and paid taxes only to them (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 198, 247). It follows from this that a year after the Partav Council, in 705, after returning

to Albania, Varaz-Tiridates regained legal authority, and Prince Shero was captured and sent to Syria that same year. It is this fact that once again proves that the official abolishment of the Albanian state had no connection with the Council of Partav in 704.

In the *History of Caucasian Albania*, it is noted that Varaz-Tiridates was killed in 822. He was from the dynasty of Mihranids, who dominated the region for five centuries, and Varaz-Tiridates II was the eighth ruler of Albania (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 207). This information seems to contradict the fact that in the year 705 the statehood of Caucasian Albania was abolished by the Arabs.

For the period between 705, when Varaz-Tiridates I, the fourth ruler of the Mihranid dynasty regained his power, and until the murder of Varaz-Tiridates II in 822, there ruled four Albanian kings (Kagankatvatsi 1861, p. 342). According to the same source, after the Varaz-Tiridates II was killed in 822, the power in Albania passed to Sahl Smbatean who was from the same dynasty, and the rule of Albanian Christians continued in the country.[1]

In 837 an army which included 12,000 horsemen set off from Baghdad to invade Albania. In the same year, Sahl Smbatean from the royal dynasty of Mihranids seized Babek, the head of the Khurramite movement, and delivered him to the Arabs.[2] In return, he received supreme rule over Iberia and Albania, where he reigned as king (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 210). After these events, in 861 in the northeastern territory of Albania, the Shirvanshahs together with the head of a dynasty of Arab origin – Mazyadids – proclaimed their independence, and successive feudal states began to appear on the historical lands of Azerbaijan (*Azərbaycan Tarixi* 2007, p. 248).

In 893, the venerable Prince Grigor Hamam restored the Albanian kingdom in the northwestern regions (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 213). In the territory of Azerbaijan, a few Christian states continued to exist in parallel with the Muslim states of the Shirvanshahs and Sajids. The Albanian state that was restored by Hamam was conquered before the early 11th century – in the year 1008 – by the military forces of David, the chorepiscopus of Kakheti, and with the support of some representatives of the ruling circles of Eretia (the name of Albania in Georgian sources) (Khalilov 2011, pp. 60–65).

The wife of Varaz-Tiridates I (d. 822) married her daughter Sprama to Atrner-sekh, the son of the ruler of Syunik–Sakhl. The representative of this family Senekerim (reigned in 1084/5) restored the long non-existent kingdom (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 216). Consequently,

[1] Editor's Note: English-speaking scholars have interpreted from Movses Kaghankatvatsi's *History of Caucasian Albania* that Sahl Smbatean was a member of the ancient Aranshahik family (Dowsett 1960, p. 55, 214, 217). The dynastic names *Zarmirhakan* and *Mirhranid* should not be confused. Moreover, it is likely that the ruling families of the region had intermarried; Cyrille Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp. 257–258, especially note 362; *see* also C. Dowsett, "A Neglected Passage in the 'History of the Caucasian Albanians'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 19.3 (1957), pp. 456–468 (especially pg. 462). Regarding the origins of the Christian Mihranids, *see* the brief note of Toumanoff (1963, pp. 83–84, n. 105).

[2] Ibid.

the long-time vanished Albanian kingdom (Eretia in Georgian sources), conquered by the Georgians in 1008, was then restored by the Syunik prince Senekerim (Hovhannes), who was related to Mihranids on the maternal side.

At the end of the 12th century the Principality of Syunik, covering the historical lands of Zangezur and Nakhchivan, declined. The death of the princes Grigor II in 1166 and Hasan in 1170 caused cessation of the dominant dynasty. The Khachen Principality, which arose on the territory of Artsakh-Khachen in the late 12th – early 13th centuries, was interpreted by I. A. Orbeli as part of ancient Albania. The center of the Artsakh-Khachen Principality encompassed the basins of the Khachen and, partially, Tartar rivers (Orbeli 1963, p. 146).

In 1214, a representative of Albanian Mihranids became the leader of this principality – Hasan Jalal Dawla (1214–1261).[3] In epigraphic inscriptions of that era, Hasan Jalal is endued with the following titles: "the prince of princes", "the prince of the Khachen country", "the most blessed prince of the Khachen and Artsakh countries", "the lord", "the crown bearer", "the lord of Albania", etc. Hasan Jalal called himself "autocrat". The worthiest title dedicated to him was reflected in the epigraphy of the Gandzasar Monastery in 1240: "I am Jalal Dawla, the son of Vakhtang, the grandson of the great Hasan, the autochthonal ruler of the high and great Artsakh country, and the king in the multirange region" (Orbeli 1963, pp. 156–158).

In 1255, during the Mongol invasion, in order to ensure the security of his state, Hasan Jalal went to the capital of Mongolia, Karakorum, to meet with Möngke Khan. However, after returning in 1261, he was killed at the instigation by the Mongol Argun Khan (Orbeli 1963, pp. 151–161). Later, during the 15th century, the House of Hasan-Jalalyan received the title "Melik" from Jahan Shah, leader of the Turkic Kara-Koyunlu tribe. In the 15th century, these principalities began to be called "melikdoms". The main reason for this renaming was associated with the updating terminology to reflect a new socio-political system (Mammadova 2005, p. 593).

Eventually the House of Hasan-Jalalyan split into five independent Albanian feudal melikdoms (Gyulyustan, Jeraberd, Khachen, Varand, Dizak) (*Azərbaycan Tarixi* 2007, vol. III, pp. 45–46). It should be noted that in the article by I. A. Orbeli that during 12th century – by the year 1182 – the process of partition of six (five) principalities between the sons of the great Hasan Jalal began in the Khachen Albanian Principality (Orbeli 1963, pp. 146–147).

According to historical information about the Gandzasar region, the House of the Hasan Jalal had secular power in Khachen until the 15th century. The representatives of this family,

[3] Editor's Note: The origins of the the Hasan-Jalalian Dynasty is unclear from the historical records, though there seems some relationship between the "House of Siunia" and the "House of Khachen"; it is possible there may have been some earlier blood ties to the Mihrands [Toumanoff 1963, p. 217 n. 250; T. De Waal. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 152–157].

who had the title of "Melik" and also became the regional Catholicos Patriarchs of the Church. From this time until 1836, heading the secular government, they were representatives of religious authority in the Gandzasar Catholicosate (*Gandzasar* ... 1990, p. 34–37).

After the inclusion of the Safavids in the Azerbaijani state, the Artsakh-Khachen lands constituted the core of the Karabakh Province in the 16th century. In the late 17th century – early 18th century, the liberation movement of the Turkic-Albanian population against Persian and Ottoman rule began in the historical territories of Azerbaijan, including Artsakh-Khachen, Karabakh and Syunik. Part of this movement was led by the heirs of the ancient princely royal dynasty of Khachen, representatives of the Albanian and Zangezur (Syunik) Melik clans – Israil Ori, Davidbek, and the Albanian Catholicos Yessai Hassan-Jalalyan. In search of ways of liberation, they linked their hopes with Russia. In 1723, the representatives of the Albanian people sent a letter to Peter I (Mammadova 2005, pp. 594–595).

The Karabakh Khanate was created after the collapse of the empire of Nadir Shah in 1747, where the Catholicosate in Gandzasar had been functioning since 1240, was included in the Russian Empire in 1805. According to some historians, there was even a plan for the restoration of the Albanian kingdom, which was proposed by Peter I and was approved by Catherine II. However, all attempts at a political revival of the Karabakh *meliks* in connection with the political events that took place in the region were unsuccessful (Mammadova 2005, p. 601).

The Gyulistan and Turkmanchai agreements of 1813 and 1828, concluded with the goal of dividing the Azerbaijani khanates between Iran and Russia. According to Azerbaijani historians, this also led to the signing of the Adrianople Peace Treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1829, allowing the Russian Empire to relocate Armenians from the territories of these states to the occupied lands of the Azerbaijani khanates. This created a new buffer zone in order to eliminate the danger from the bordering Muslim states (Mammadova 2005, pp. 556–557). For this imperialist goal, were chosen the territories of the Nakhchyvan, Irevan and Karabakh khanates. The studies of F. Mammadova suggest that the Armenian Gregorian Church, which never had its diocese in the Caucasus, began to carry out its confessional activities with a small number of clergymen in 1441 (15th century) during the reign of Jahan Shah of the Kara-Koyunlu tribe, in Etchmiadzin (Armenia).[4]

As a result of the 1829 resettlement policy, the Armenians numerically surpassed the local Albanian Christian population. Because Armenians were adherents of Monophysitism, they appropriated the local churches and monasteries, of which, Azerbaijan scholars termed "Gregorianization" or Armenianization . In 1836, the Armenians sought the reassignment of the "Albanian Apostolic Autocephalous Church" with its center in Gandzasar to

[4] Editor's Note: Dr. Farida Mammadova's research has significantly contributed to our knowledge of medieval history; however, some of her theories has also garnered strong criticism by scholars outside Azerbaijan. Her conclusions require further scrutiny regarding her interpretation of historical texts and the archaeological evidence (Mammadova 2005, pp. 736–770).

Etchmiadzin as a diocese (*Decree of Emperor Nikolai* I ..., RGIA. F. 796, cipher. 17, case 1821, pp. 1–18).

In 1909–1910 Armenians resettled in the South Caucasus. F. Mammadova theorized that, because there was a decree in which unnecessary documents could be liquidated in the church archives of the Russian Synod, Armenians destroyed the religious and historical works of the Albanian Church (Mammadova 2005, p. 607). So it is claimed by some historians that the Albanian Apostolic Church was autocephalous from the 4th century to 1836. As such, the centers of the Albanian patriarchate were Chola (Derbent), Barda (6th–8th centuries), Berdakur (Gazakh – 8th–9th centuries), Charek-Khamshi near Kedabek (Chanagchi); and, for a short time, the church of Khudavank (Dadivank) on the territory of Khachen, and finally in 1240–183, Gandzasar (Cathedral in Kelbajar) (Mammadova 2005, p. 555). The gradual spread of Islamic in the territory of Caucasian Albania led to the construction of dual-use religious monuments in this region, affiliated with both Christianity and Islam. The process of Islamization of the population on the plains was completed relatively quicker than in the mountainous regions. Islam was alien to the religious and ethnic consciousness of the Albanian population, who lived in the mountainous regions of the Lesser and Greater Caucasus mountains, and for centuries they preserved and carried out their religion in accordance with the Monophysite (in the Lesser Caucasus regions) and Dyophysite (Greater Caucasus) traditions. In the 19th century, the resettlement policy of the Russian Empire laid a foundation for the process of constructing a new national identity of the sparse population of the border regions.

It should be especially noted that, unlike in mountainous areas, the reason for the small number of Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania, in the region of Arran, is the widespread use of mud brick in their construction. For example, the identification of Christian monuments in the lowland regions became possible only because of recent archaeological research.

After the spread of Christianity in Caucasian Albania, Christians became the cultural leaders, creating numerous monuments of material culture and spiritual character. However, the lack of historical documentation and archaeological remains limits the comprehensiveness of our understanding. Nevertheless, taking this into account, when gathering all the data – archaeological, epigraphic, architectural, and historical photographic materials – there is a sizable amount of information about the Christian monuments in Azerbaijan, which indicates that most, but not all, belong to the material heritage of Caucasian Albania.

The Agoglan monastery, located in the Lachin district holds a unique position among the monuments of Albanian Christian architecture according to the monumental design and construction techniques. It is known that this monastery belongs to the 5th–6th centuries and is built of durable basalt. Having been destroyed in various periods, it was restored in the 9th century. The three-aisled Agoglan monastery was quite large: its length was 25 m and its width was 12.5 m (*Azərbaycan Tarixi* 2007, vol. II, pp. 308–310) (Fig. 1.*1*).

In 1968 the archaeological excavations of the eastern wall of the Amaras monastery, in the Jutchu Village of the Khojavend District revealed three construction periods. The first period refers to the early 4th century, the second one to the 10th century, and the third, to the 19th century. This church was thoroughly restored in the 11th century, and in the 13th century it was rebuilt by the Albanian princes of Khachen, and turned into a monastic complex. In the late Middle Ages, Albanians – both Muslims and Christians – went on a pilgrimages there, praying for fertility issues in particular, such as the conception of children, and they also provided offerings there.

The church was divided into three aisles by four columns built on stone foundations – two on each side (Geyushev 1975, p. 53). The archaeological research revealed that the monastery complex (which is 23 m long and 13.33 m wide) included the shrine and sarcophagus of St. Grigoris, residential and farm buildings, and fortified stone walls (Geyushev 1984, p. 89) (Fig. 1.*2*).

Not far from the center of the Kelbajar district, in the village of Vank, there is the Khudavenk (or Khota-Venk) Monastery. According to legend, it was built in honor of the disciple of the Apostle Thaddaeus, named Dadi. The Khudavenk monastery, also called Dadi-Vank, was restored in the 15th century by the Albanian prince. The design of this monastery, having dyophysite elements, apparently was based on the so-called "Albanian basilica" type, represented by the churches of Arzu-Khatun and Hasan Jalal.

This monument is a large complex, having many additional buildings and rooms besides the main church. There are several halls, utility and living quarters, a barn, a chapel, and fortress walls covering a vast territory (Geyushev 1972, pp. 65–66). The column-less single-aisle, inner hall of the church is 16.20 m long and 5.80 m wide (Geyushev 1984, p. 86) (Figs. 1.*3*).

The church of Arzu-Khatun is a monument within the Khudavenk monastery complex. In 1214, it was built by Arzu Khatun Artsruni, the wife of prince Vakhtang, and dedicated in the memory of her husband and two sons. Carved near a window of the eastern facade there is an image of Vakhtang, and on the southern facade are a representation of their two sons. The church has a rectangular layout and there are small rooms on both sides of the front door. In each corner of its cruciform central part are two-story pastophoria. The corner rooms have an apse oriented to the east. The stairs are attached to the wall of the main altar in order to ascend to the tier of the second floor (Mamedova 2004, pp. 119–120) (Fig. 1.*3*).

The Urekavank (Holy Head Monastery) (better known as the Horekavank) is located near village of Talish in the Terter District, like other churches in Caucasian Albania, has undergone restorations, but the only surviving area includes the original apse dating to the 5th century. It should be noted that the reason why this areas was kept preserved, according to M. Kaghankatvatsi, is because within was the buried head of St. Elisha. The rectangular bema of the church has a length of 7.60 m and a width of 4.30 m. In the 13th century (i.e. 1284) the church on the western side was complemented by a narthex with dimensions

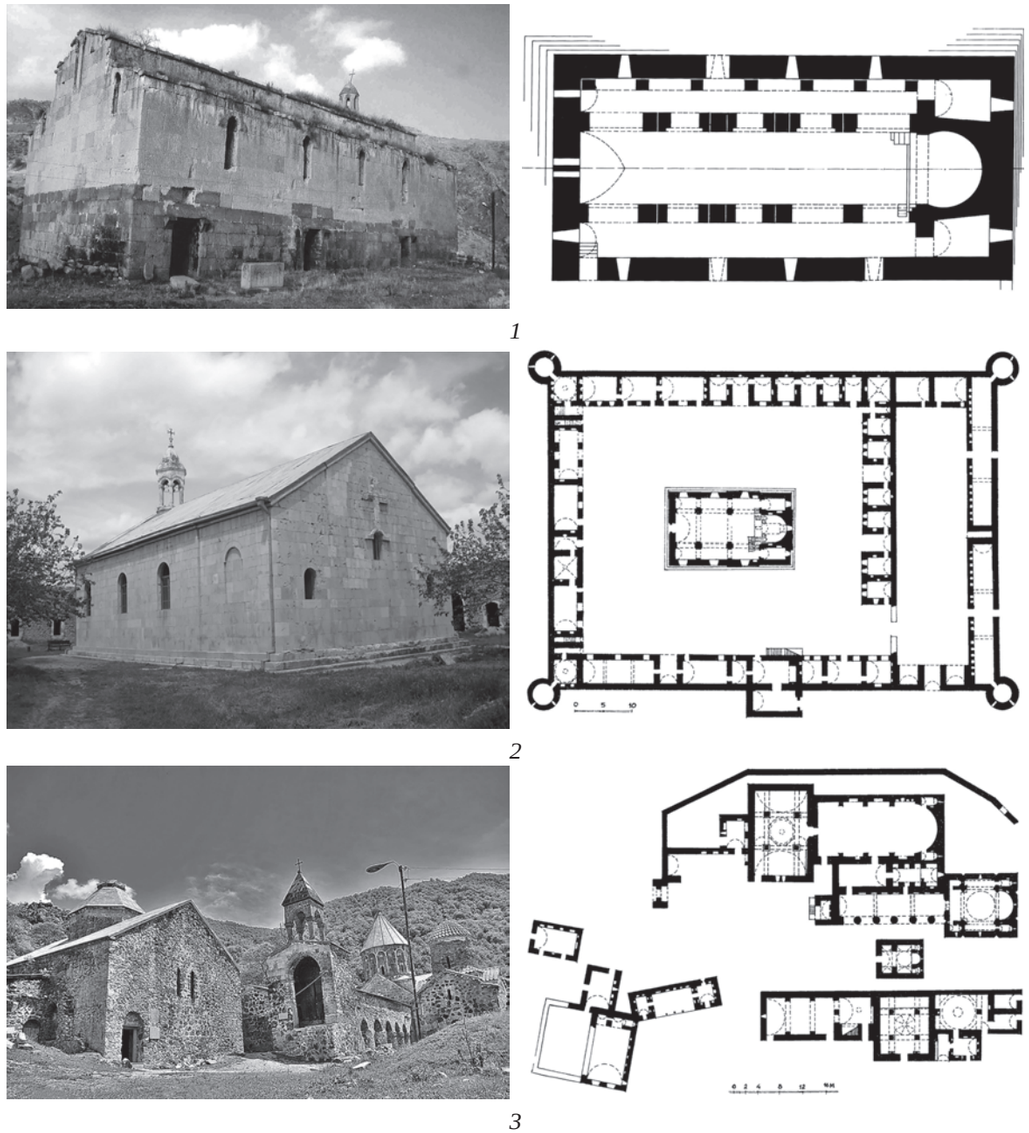

Fig. 1. Photo and plan of the monasteries: 1. Agoglan. 2. Amaras. 3. Khudavenk

measuring 7×7.50 m. Based on the interpretation of the inscription in narthex's tympanum, the date of its restoration was 1279 (Mamedova 2004, p. 40) (Fig. 2.*1*).

The Gandzasar monastery, in the village of Vanklu within the Kelbajar district, is an Albanian monastery. Located on the left bank of Khachenchai River, the monastery was a central residence of the Albanian Apostolic Church from the 13th to the 19th century. Based on the inscription on the stone embedded within the wall, the monument was built sometime

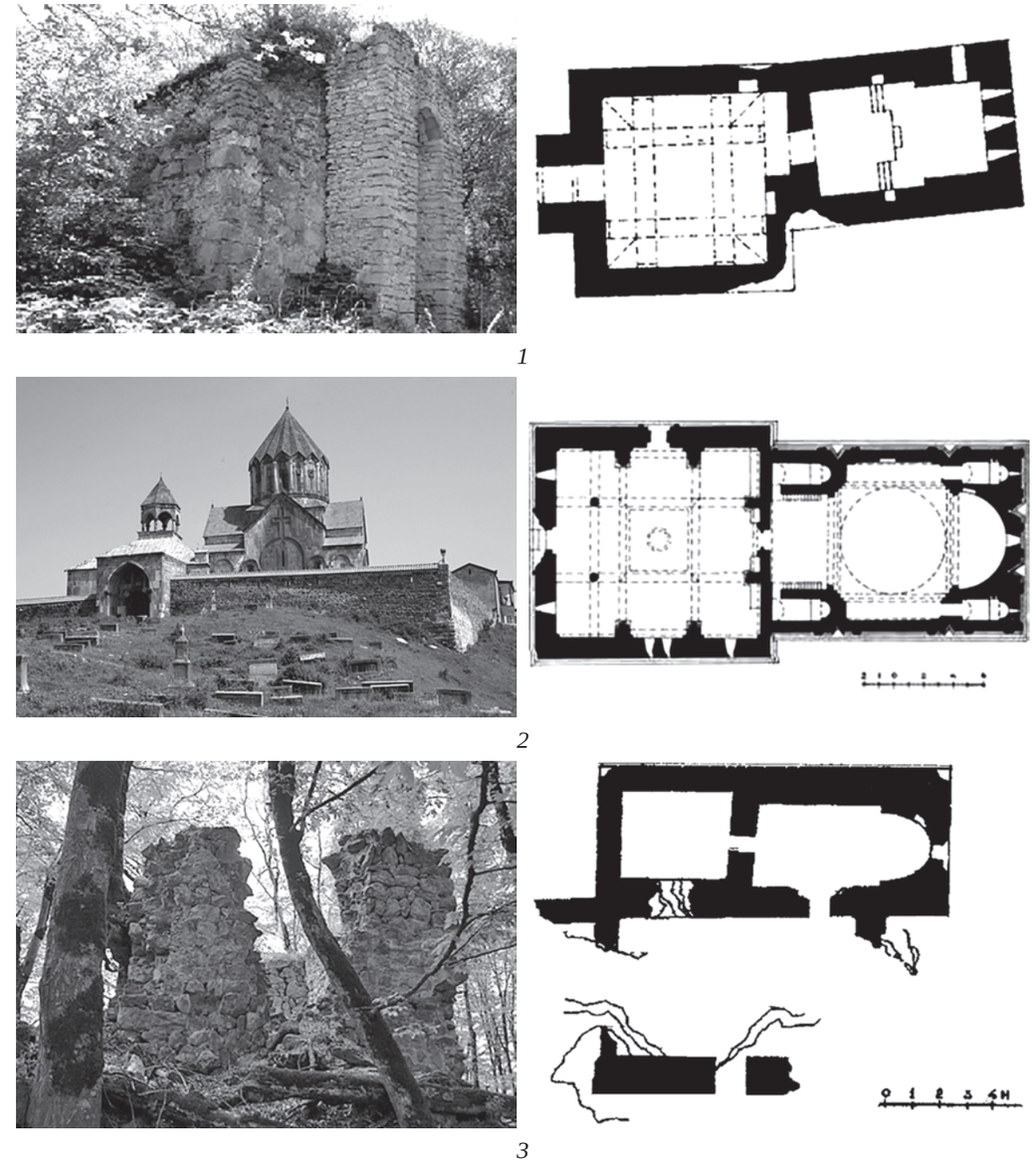

Fig. 2. Photo and plan of the monasteries: 1. Urekvank. 2. Gandzasar. 3. Avaptuk

between 1216 and 1238 by "the ruler of the high and great Artsakh country, the king of the great country of Artsakh, the grandson of the great Hasan, the son of Vakhtang, Hasan-Jalal Dawla and his mother Khorishe Khatun". Many Albanian religious figures from the Hasan Jalal family are buried in the territory of this church complex (Orbeli 1963, p. 151). The monastery functioned until 1836 as the center of the Albanian Catholicosate (Fig. 2.*2*).

The Avaptuk monument located on the territory of the Kelbajar district has a trapezoidal shape. It is located five kilometers south of the Gandzasar monastery in a difficult to access mountainous area. The monastery complex consists of a small church, a narthex, and a chapel. There are numerous other constructions and a graveyard with several khachkars (cross stones). Above the entrance, in the tympanum, there is an inscription stating that the monument was built in 1163 during the reign of Prince Vakhtang, and was restored in 1223 during the reign of Prince Hasan-Jalal Dawla (Mkrtchyan 1989, pp. 22–23) (Fig. 2.*3*).

The Khatravank monastery complex is located at a distance of two kilometers from Terterchai southeast of the Khudavenk monastery and consists of dilapidated fortress walls and the old and new churches. The complex includes a church, a chapel, a bell tower and a settlement. From the inscription on the building, it follows that the main church of the Khatravank monastery was built in 1204 (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 41) (Fig. 3.*1*).

About three kilometers away from the village of Gozlu in the Kelbajar district there is a ruined church. It has an epigraphic inscription of which indicates that this church was built in 1215 by the daughter of the Great Hasan Grigor, the wife of Prince Takhan. The monastery consists of a church with two pastophoria, a chapel (now in ruins), a large narthex, and other buildings (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 48) (Fig. 3.*2*).

In the center of the village of Gozlu in the Kelbajar district there is a ruined monastery complex that still has some parts of the church walls still standing. The inscription on the northern wall of the church indicates that in 1183 it was built by Hasan, the son of Vakhtang. The inscription within the narthex indicates that was later attached to the monastery, stating: "[Built] Under the Principality of the Great Jalal Dawla and leadership of Ter Nerses Catholicos of Albania of 1246". The frescoes on the walls of the monastery depict Holy Mary, in connection with the fact that the monastery is named after the Blessed Mother. It was greatly damaged in the 1920s (Mkrtchyan 1989, pp. 48–49).

In the Kelbajar district, at a distance of three km from the village of Gozlu, stands the Red monastery, built in 1224. It is surrounded by deep moats and tall mountains. The complex consists of a church, a narthex, a chapel, a ruined dormitory, and other buildings. The earliest inscription indicates that the son of Vakhtang, the brother of Hasan, built this church and gave it to his son Grigor for his memory. Another building inscription indicates that this church was rebuilt in 1259 with an offering of Grigor, a bishop of the Amara monastery (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 50) (Fig. 3.*2*).

Within the territory of the Kelbajar district, at the intersection of the villages of Chaldyran and Zeilik, in the mountain range of the right bank of the Terterchai River, there is a cruciform monastery (5.2×4.2). Although historical records do not indicate the exact date of building of the church, there is a mention of Prince Vakhtang from the Hasan-Jalal family, who died in 1214. It can be concluded that the church was either renovated or rebuilt completely in the late 12th or early 13th century. In the northern and southern parts of the transept there are two semi-circular and two square niches set within the walls. The church is covered in plaster

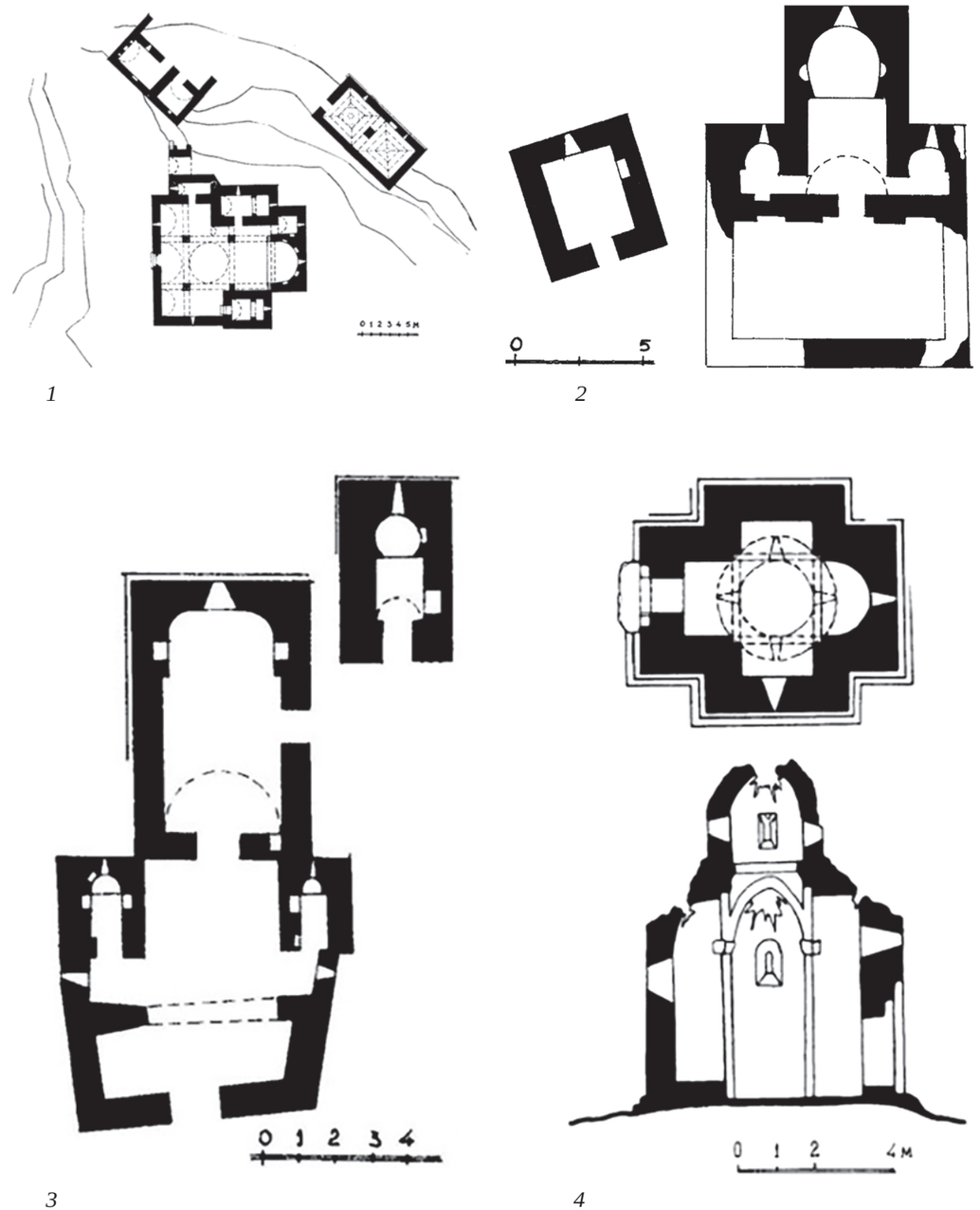

Fig. 3. Monastery Plans: 1. Khatravank. 2. Gozlu. 3. Red Monastery. 4. Cruciform church

on the inside while its foundation constructed from the living rock. Around the monastery there are the remains of utility rooms, ancient and modern gravestones, khachkars of the 12th–13th centuries with inscriptions and ornamental carvings (Mkrtchyan 1989, pp. 50–51) (Fig. 3.*4*).

The monastery of St. Elisha was built in 1248 and is located in the Terter district, at the foot of Murovdag, near the ruined village of king Vachagan, identified as the historic site of Divtakan. This monastery and church had different names throughout history: St. Elisha, Ners-Mikhr, Jervshtik and, in the 13th century, Yegishe Arakel. The width of the first building is 4.2 m, in the eastern part there is an extant semi-circular apse. In the 9th–10th centuries the church was destroyed. The construction of the monastery began in the 11th century. Currently, the foundations of the former basilica is 10 m long and 5.40 m wide. In the western part, there is a quadrangular narthex with a western entrance; curiously, it is supported by four columns in the interior. Its length is 9.50 m and its width is 8.45 m (Geyushev 1984, pp. 90–91) (Fig. 4).

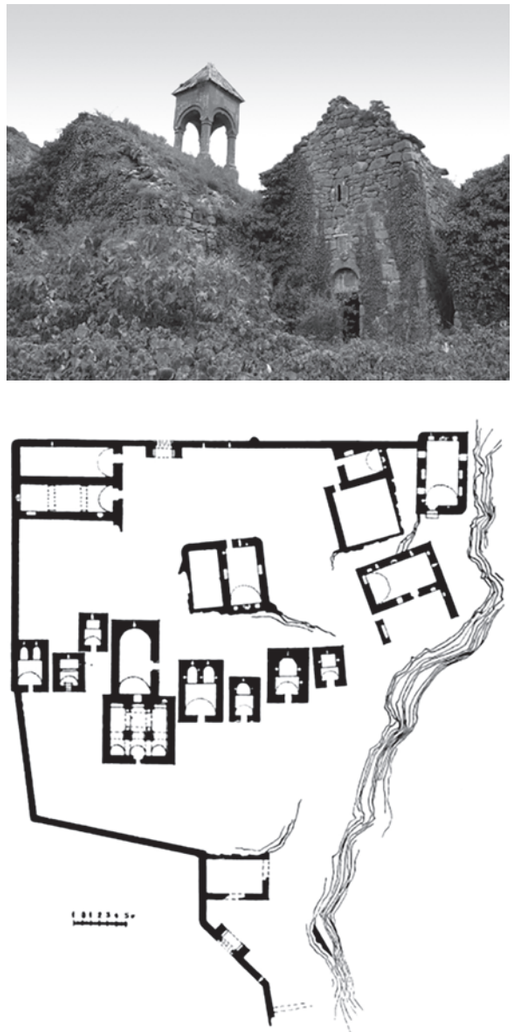

Fig. 4. Photograph and plan of the monastery of St. Elisha

The Nur church is located near the Balaken district. It has a rectangular shape with a length of 9.20 m and a width of 6.70 m. The monument was studied by G. G. Mammadova, who noted its semicircular apse that had one window. The pilasters engaged to the walls rise upward and form the ribs the vaulted ceiling. Near the apse, closer to the center of the chapel, on the northern and southern walls are two windows.

A two-storeyed bell tower was built near the western part of the church. Heavy pillars on the ground floor led from the entrance into the church. The second storey probably held a bell which does not survived to our time. Interestingly, the buildings were built from different materials: the church was built of hewn

stones while the bell tower connecting to it was made of fired bricks. G. G. Mamedova, based her dating on the technology of the construction, belonging to the 12th–13th centuries (2004, p. 110) (Fig. 5.*1*).

The church of Chudulu-Bina in the Zagatala district (12.70×11 m) was built entirely of square fired bricks (measuring 22×22×5 cm). The width of the apse in regard to the length is 3.10×4.90 m. The thickness of the wall of the monument is one meter, the length of the nave with respect to the width is 9.50×7.10 m. In the northern and southern parts of the apse there are pastophoria for the priests with an entrance 90 cm wide, and length relative to the width was 2×1.50 m. G. G. Mammadova noted that the dome of the monument is vaulted. Two aisles were formed by two pairs of pilasters (80×15 cm). The width of the inner entrance on the western side is 1.25 m, and on the outside is one meter wide. The dome of the church ends with a high cupola. This monument is dated to the 16th century (Mamedova 2004, p. 125) (Fig. 5.*2*).

Field research conducted by R. B. Geyushev and A. B. Nuriyev in the village of Tatly of Gazakh district (now Akstafa) led to the investigation of a three-aisle Albanian church built of limestone. Inside there was revealed a 38 cm long and 24–29 cm wide tile, which was attributed to the early Middle Ages. A gold coin with the impression of the Byzantine emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067) was also found here. Based on the available archaeological materials, the authors dated the monument to the 10th–13th centuries (Geyushev and Nuriyev 1978, pp. 42–44).

During a study of the village of Jullyuk in the Gakh district it was determined that the church within was built at the highest elevation point along the east-west axis. The monument was constructed of rubble masonry, limestone, brick, which are characteristics of the early Middle Ages, and set with a mortar. The total size of the church is 6×4.50 m. The thickness of the church wall is 80 cm, the length of the nave is 3.25 m, and the width is 2.90 m; the apse's length is relative to the width being 1.70×2.40 m.

The northern and southern walls of the apse had niches 70 cm wide and one meter tall. In the western wall there is a doorway which is 90 cm wide, while the total height of the church is more than five meters. The extant upper ceiling of the church were barrel vaulted. The ceramic vessels used for acoustics were placed near the altar to amplify the sound during the prayer. Only the western and northern walls of the monument were destroyed (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 96) (fig. 5.*3*).

On the territory of the village of Amirjan in the Gakh district there was studied a single-aisled Albanian Christian monument with a wall thickness between 0.8 and 1.20 m and a ruined vaulted ceiling. Its total dimensions are 9.10×5.90 m. The length of the nave inside the monument is 4.80 m, the width is 4.30 m, the length of the apse (in regard to the width) is 2.96×4.20 m. The monument is built of rubble stones, ashlar limestone, and bricks, all bonded with mortar. There are doorways that are 1.30 m wide in the western and southern areas. The nave's interior measures 2.05 m from east to west (excluding the chancel and

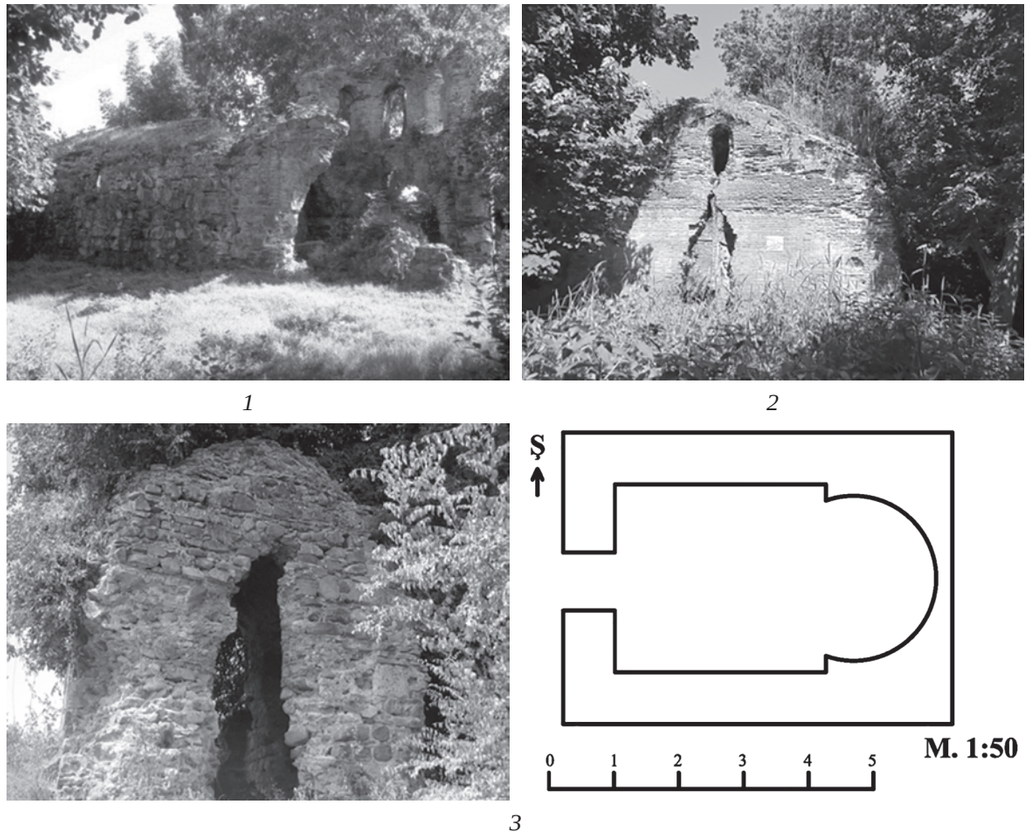

Fig. 5. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Nur monastery church. 2. Chudulu Bina. 3. Gyullyuk

the apse). At opposite sides of the northern and southern walls there are pilasters with dimensions 25×25 cm. Although the monument is externally lined with calcareous stones, they can be traced only 20–30 cm from the surface of the earth (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 96) (Fig. 6.*1*).

In the village of Alatamir in the Gakh district, there was studied a single-aisled Albanian Christian monument with a destroyed vaulted ceiling, with dimensions of 9.55×6.40 m. The church walls had a thickness of one meter and were lined inside and outside with limestone which were 20–25 cm thick. The length of the church is 5.55 m, the width is 4.40 m; the apse's width is 3.90 m and the length was 2.75 m.

In the eastern wall of the apse there was a window opening in the shape of a loophole, and in the northern and southern walls there are niches with dimensions of 30×30 cm. There is a door in the center of the western wall of the monument, the width of the opening is 1.30 m. In the southern part at a distance of 1.10 m from the apse's back wall there is an opening for the second door which is 1.25 m wide. At a distance of 2.60 m east of the

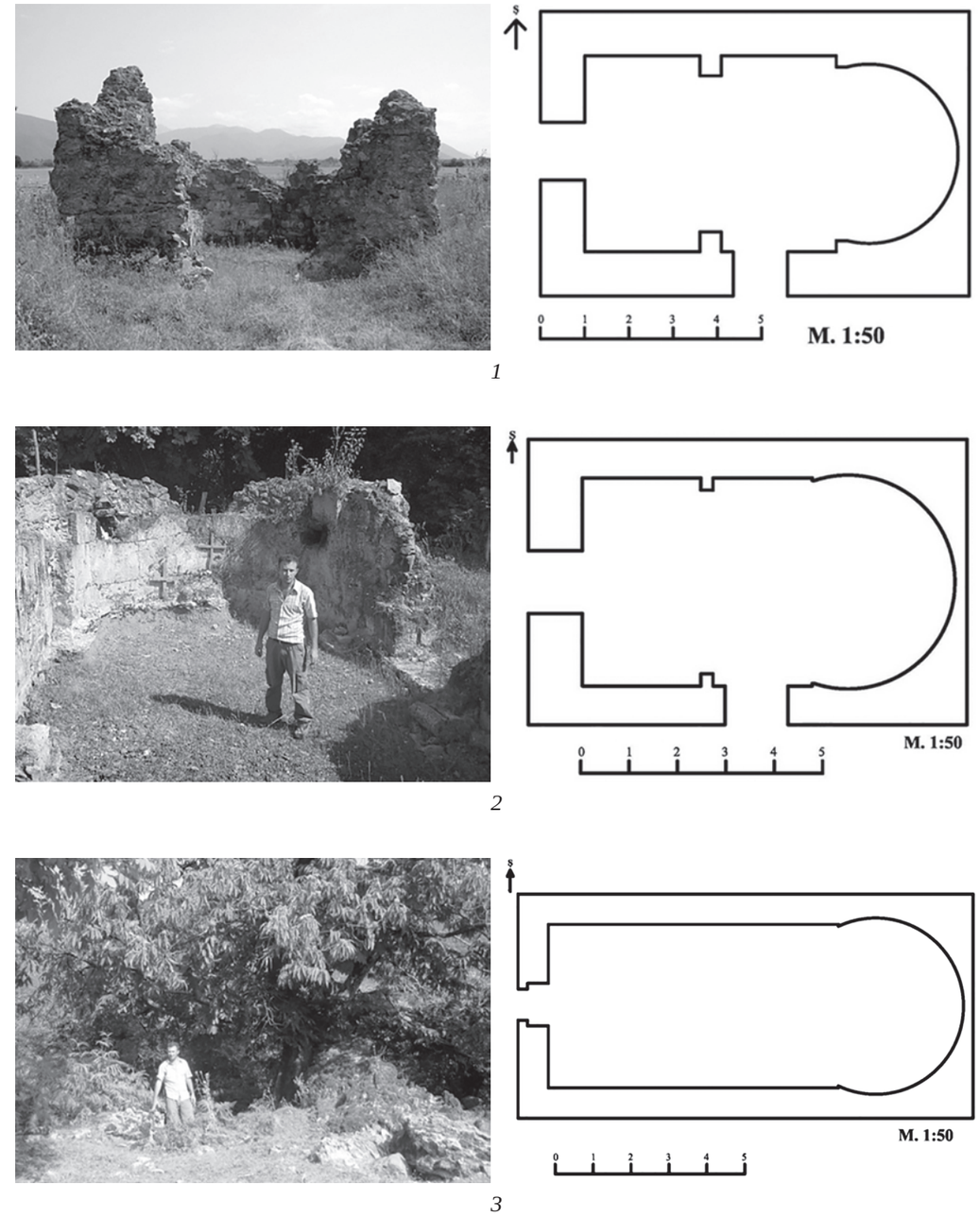

Fig. 6. Photo and plan of the churches. 1. Amirjan. 2. Alatemir. 3. Chinarly

church's western entrance, on the northern and southern walls, opposite each other, there are limestone pilasters with dimensions of 45×43 cm. The monument was completely cleaned and covered with gravel inside. The apse of the church, survives up to a height of 50 cm, but is in a ruined state (Alishov 2013, no. 1, pp. 96–97) (Fig. 6.*2*).

On the territory of the village of Chinarly in the Gakh district, there is an Albanian Christian monument, ruined to the ground level. Its dimensions are 12×5.90 m. The church located on an elevated hill, with walls 80 cm thick. The length of the nave is 7.65 m and the width is 4.30 m. The width of the apse near the eastern wall is 4.20 m and the length is 3.30 m. The sacred pastophoria are located in the northern and southern areas of the apse. The church is built of limestone, rubble masonry, and brick, all bonded with a mortar. Based on the dimensions of the extant parts of the door on the western wall, it was found that the doorway at the entrance to the church was 82 cm wide, and the entrance to the hall was expanded by 1.05 m (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 97) (Fig. 6.*3*).

The village of Lekit-Malakh in the Gakh district was studied where an Albanian church has partly survived and its eastern walls still rise up to 2.80 m. The thickness of its foundations are 80 cm, the length of the nave is 8.90 m, and the width is 6.10 m. The width of the apse in the eastern part of the monument, relative to the length, is 6.10×2.50 m. The 80 cm wide entrance door of the church is located on the eastern wall and leads into a corridor that is 12.50 cm long and 1.90 cm wide. The church is built of rubble masonry using lime mortar (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 97) (Fig. 7.*1*).

The vault is not preserved in the single-aisled Garabulag church in the territory of the village of Ilisu in the Gakh district, on the left bank of the Ag-chai River. Only the side walls with a thickness of 80 cm remained intact. The total size of the church is 7.20×5.20 m. The length of the nave is 3.90 m, the width is 3.40 m. The length of the apse at the eastern end, in regard to the width, is 3×1.70 m. The entrance is 1.10 m wide and is located within the western wall, the and its thickness is 1.35 m. On the southern and northern walls, 1.40 m from the western wall towards the altar, there are paired protrusions of pilasters with a width in regard to the length of 60×20 cm which, rising upwards, form the shape of the arch. On the northern and southern walls from the apse's threshold, about 1.10 m in the direction of the eastern wall, there are niches 60 cm wide and 70 cm tall. Roughly hewn rock stones served as building material. Large rock stones were also used for cladding (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 97) (Fig. 7.*2*).

On the territory of Tendirli, close to the center of the Gakh district, there was discovered an Albanian monument measuring 7.40×4.20 m, but has almost disappeared, except for the base. The walls' thickness is 80 cm, the length inside the nave in respect of the width is 4.55×2.40 m. The width of the apse at the eastern end is 1.90 m and its length is 1.70 m. From the doorway on the western wall, which is 90 cm wide, there only survives the foundation masonry. The church was built mainly of rubble masonry and mortar (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 98) (Fig. 7.*3*).

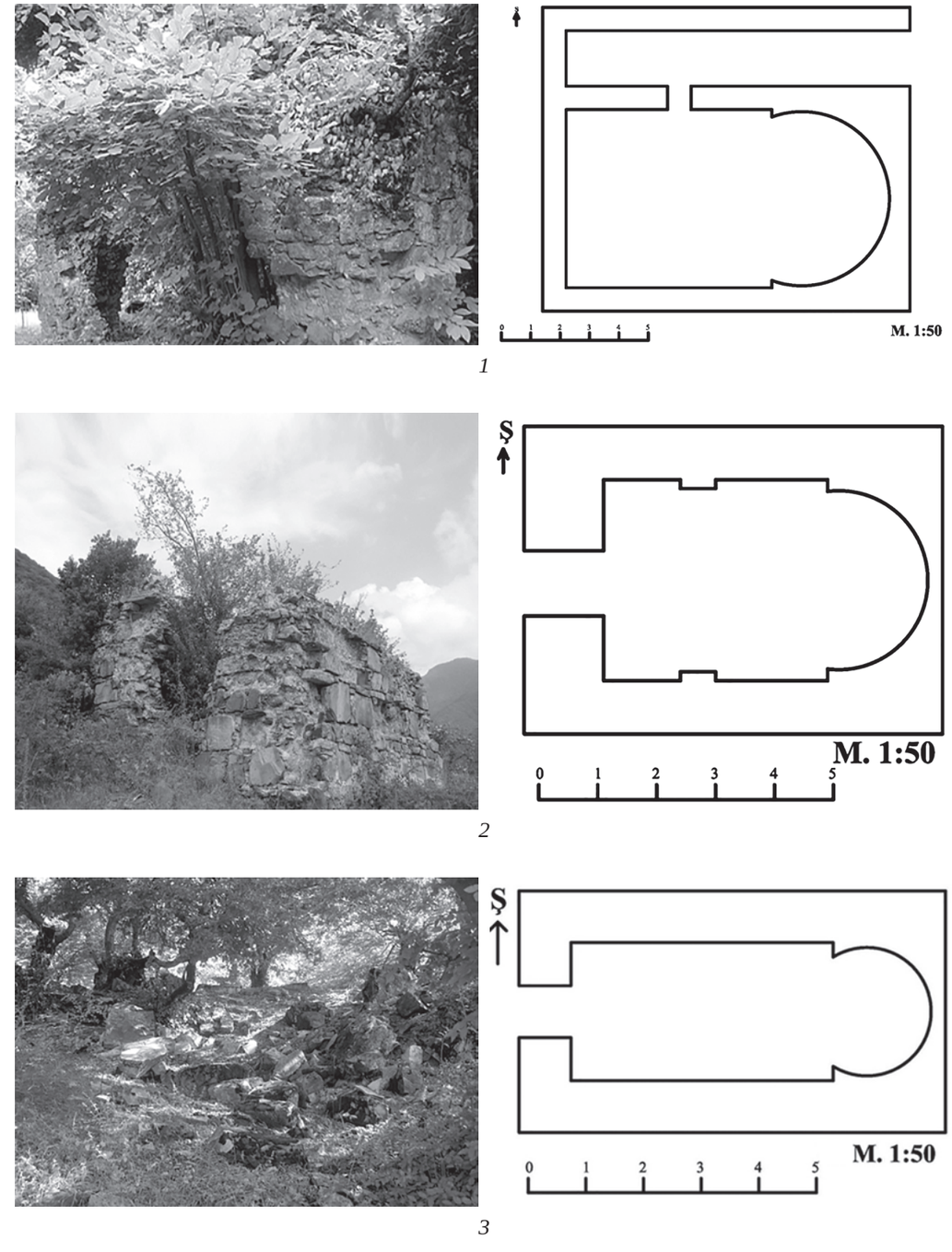

Fig. 7. Photo and plans of the churches: 1. Lekit Malakh. 2. Garabulag. 3. Tendirli

There were revealed four Albanian Christian monuments in the territory of the village of Shushkend, Gakh district. Of these, three were studied and designated by the author in Roman numerals.

The single-aisle monument of Shushkend I is located in a forest, on a high hill, and has a size of 7.40×5.65 m. The thickness of the church wall is 80 cm; the remaining northern wall has a height of two meters. The length of the nave relative to the width is 4.30×4 m, and the dimensions of the apse are 2.90×1.80 m. The church is built of rubble masonry. The entrance at the western wall is 90 cm wide (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 98) (Fig. 8.*1*).

The monument of Shushkend II is located one km north of the first site and all but the foundations has disappeared. The width of the preserved walls relative to the height is one by one meters. The church is overgrown with forest vegetation inside and out. The length of the main chamber of the church is 10 m and its width is 7.10 m; while the width of the apse is 5.50 m and its the length is 3.30 m. Near the northern and southern walls of the apse, located on the eastern side, there were areas for pastophoria. The church is built of mixed building materials, bonded with mortar (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 98) (Fig. 8.*2*).

The single-aisled monument Shushkend IV is located on the territory that the local population calls Kurgan-tepe. It is destroyed down to the foundations and the fragments of the walls are 80–90 cm in height; and the general dimensions of the church are 8.50×6.30 m. The length of the nave is 5.50 m and its width is 4.50 m; the length of the apse together with the bema is 1.70 m and its width is 3.80 m. The entrance is 90 cm wide and is located at the western end. Near the southern wall of this monument there is a vestry with a horseshoe-shaped exit which is 2 m wide and 1.50 m long. The monument was built of rubble and large ashlars using lime mortar (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 98) (Fig. 8.*3*).

The Arylyg Bina church investigated on the territory of the Balaken district has an east-west orientation. Its total dimensions is 9.85×7 m with a wall thickness of 90 cm. In its northern and western walls have a thickness of 1.40 m and are 1.35 m thick in the south, where it once had three doors. Judging by ground plan, there was a bell tower or narthex in front of the western entrance. The length of the nave in regard to the width is 5.25×5.25 m. The apse is 2.60×4.90 m. The foundations of the church are made of rubble, but the superstructure was fired brick that measured 23×23×4 cm in size. The pilasters inside (80×15 cm) supported arches and vaulting aboved (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 99) (Fig. 9.*1*).

There is an Albanian monument of complex architectural design that was studied in the village of Turshsu, Kedabek district. The length of the nave is 3.20 m and its width is 3.15 m. The dimensions of the apse are 2.65×2.10 m. The total length of the eastern wall of the monument is 8.75 m, the northern and southern walls are 6.65 m, and the western wall is 5.45 m. The entrances leads into the pastophoria, situated at the northern and southern walls, are 80 cm wide, and are not within the apse, but between the apse and the nave. The width of the pastophorion at the northern wall is 80 cm and its the length is 3.75 m.

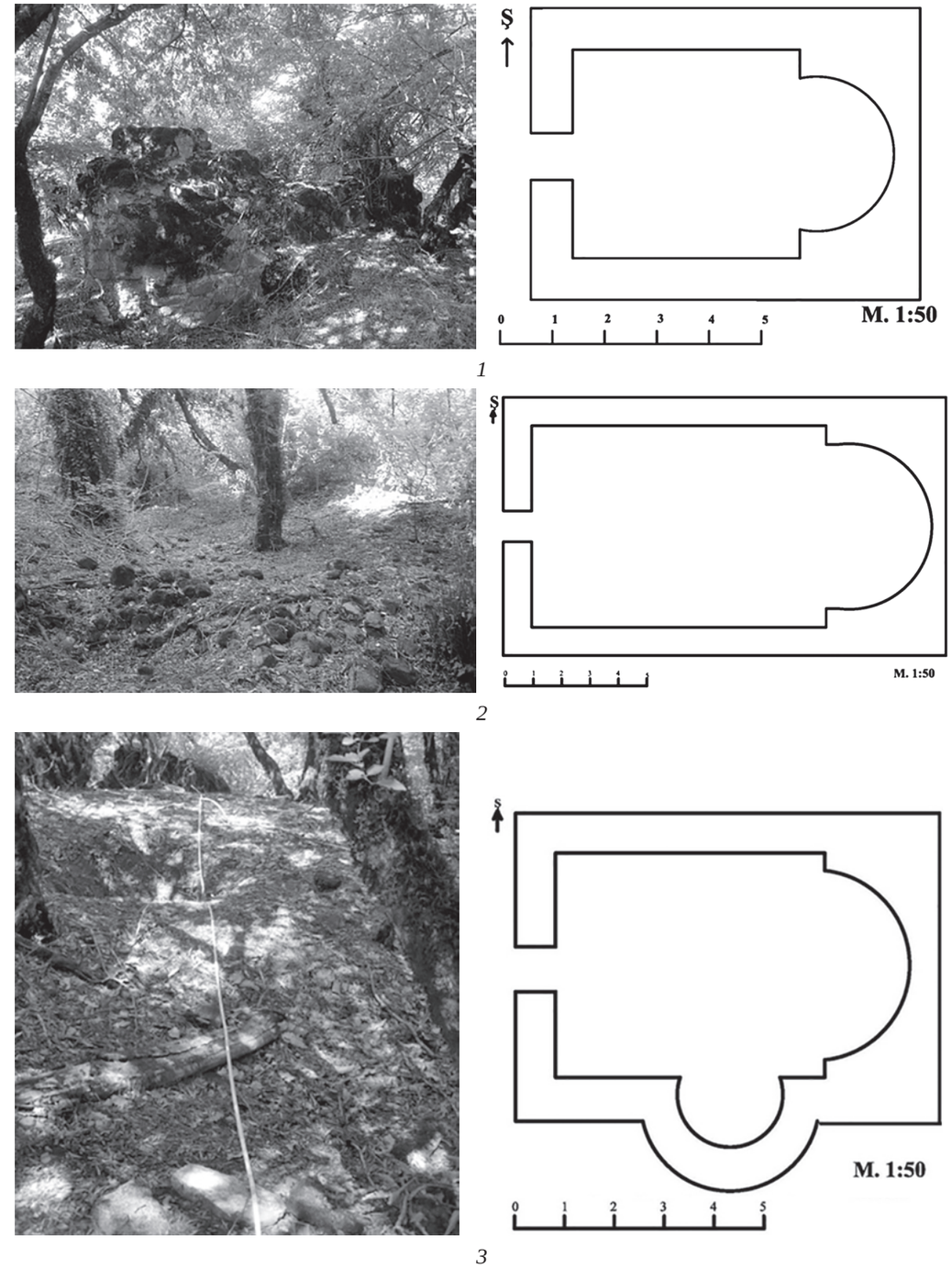

Fig. 8. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Shushkend I. 2. Shushkend II. 3. Shushkend III

In the eastern wall of the pastophorion there is a window in the form of a loophole for internal lighting. The width of the pastophorion at the southern wall is 80 cm and its length is 2.95 m. On the outside of the western wall of the nave, in the eastern direction there is a room 1.15 m wide and 2.60 m long. The entrance door of the church is 90 cm wide. The church walls are made of irregular masonry bonded with mortar. Their thickness varies from 1 to 1.30 m. The walls of the monument were plastered on the inside (Alishov 2013 no. 1, p. 136) (Fig. 9.2).

Two Albanian Christian monuments were discovered during the field research in the village of Garabulag (Qarabulaq) of the Oguz district. One of them is located in the center of the village. The church has a length of 16.50 m and a width of 8 m. Two pairs of columns and side pilasters divided the monument into three aisles. The entrance is located in the southern wall and its the thickness is 90 cm. There were two windows on the southern wall of the monument, and one window on the eastern and western walls. The width of the apse, relative to the length, is 3×3 m; near the northern and southern walls there are pastophoria that are 2.95 m long and 1.65 m wide. The ceramic sherds found within are characteristic of the Middle Ages (Alishov 2016 no. 1, p. 84) (Fig. 10).

The second church in the Oguz district is located in the southern part of the village of Garabulag, in a forested area on the right bank of the Tyuryan-chai River. A narthex was erected near the western entrance of this three-aisled church. From the pastophorion, located in the southern part of the apse, there is an entrance to the crypt, which is located under the apse. To the south of the narthex there are other buildings that are currently in ruins and, at first glance, reminiscent of monastic cells. Around the church, were recorded the tombstones and memorials of numerous funerary monuments of the Christian era. It is difficult to assess the architectural structure and its dating without archaeological research both inside and outside the church. However, it can be assumed that this particular monument was the central residence of the Gabala episcopate, mentioned in the historical sources (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 79).

The total length of the second Garabulag church, together with the narthex, is 18.50 m and the width is 9.20 m. The church is divided into three aisles by two columns. Thickness of southern and northern walls is 90 cm, while the thickness of the western wall from the entrance in the southern area is 1.1 m and in the north 90 cm.

There are pastophoria inside the church on the left and right. The entrance that leads to a reliquary crypt located under the lower part of the apse, which has a width of 70 cm. The width of the apse is 3.16 m and the length is 3 m. There are two portals: one at the southern wall that is 1 m wide and one at the western wall that is 1.20 m wide. The inner width of the church is 7 m and its length is 6.14 m (Alishov 2016 no. 1, p. 84) (Figs. 11.*1–4*).

On the territory of the Galagakh village in the Ismailli district, there is a dilapidated monument which is 19 m long, 14.50 m wide, and has a wall thickness of 1 m. It is a three-aisled basilica with four cruciform supports that carry a dome. Opposite each support

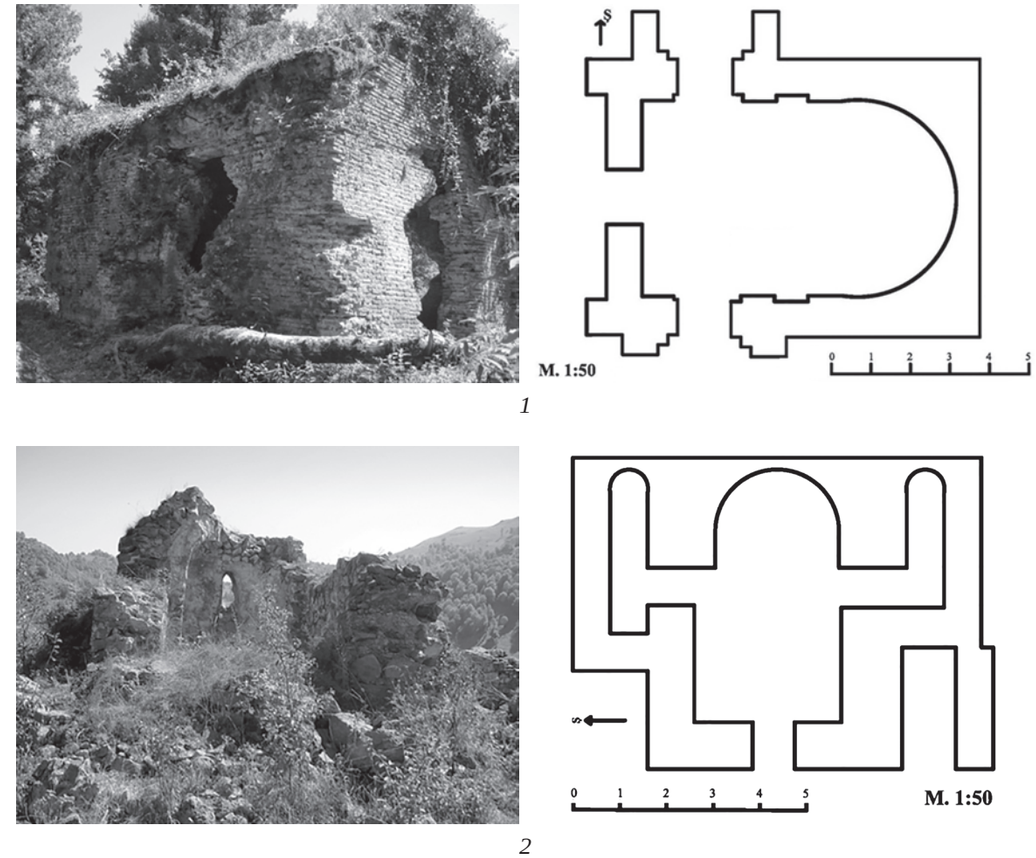

Fig. 9. Photo and plans of the churches: 1. Arylygbina. 2. Kilseli in the village of Tursu

Fig. 10. Monument of Garabulag I

along the walls there are pilasters which, rising up, formed a cruciform shape. The distance between the central piers and the pilasters of the northern wall is 2.67 m and from the pilasters of the southern area 2.45 m. The width of the apse is 4.30 m and the length is 2.65 m. The width of the entrance of the pastophoria that are situated to the right and left of the apse is 1 m; their internal length is 3 m, and the width is 2.70 cm. The northern wall and the portal of this monument survive. The doorway in the northern wall implies the

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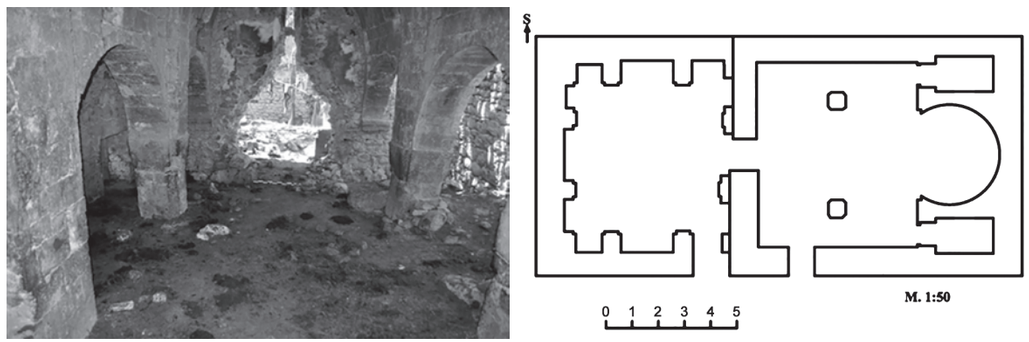

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Fig. 11. 1. Southeast view of the Monastery of Garabulag II. 2. Apse area at the Monastery of Garabulag II. 3. Entrance inside the Monastery of Garabulag II. 4. Plan of the Monastery of Garabulag II. 5. Galagakh church. 6. Plan of the Galagakh church

presence of similar entrance doors in the southern and western walls. The monument inside was lit with the help of ten windows; however, it can be reasonably reconstructed with fourteen windows. The width of the northern door is 1.73 m and the window openings are 1 m (Alishov 2016 no. 1, pp. 84–85).

In 1964, on the territory of Galagakh in the Ismailli district, in an early medieval settlement, there was found a red handmade ceramic seal that fired well. The diameter of the front side of the seal is 6 cm. It depicts a scene of the crucifixion of Christ between two circular lines filled with crosses. Above Jesus' head there is an equilateral cross, with a crescent near the left arm, and a rough-shaped tree below. Due to the fact, apparently, that the image the crucifixion in this region appeared after the 8th century, the author considered this seal belonging to this period (Geyushev 1984, p. 120) (Fig. 11.*5–6*).

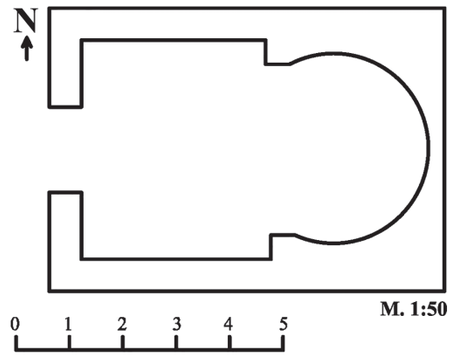
There is a church in the village of Pochtbina in the Balaken district. It measures 7.40 m in length and the width is 5.30 m. The width of the church apse is 3.20 m and the length is 3 m. The width of the monument from the inside is 4.10 m and the length is 3.45 m; while the wall thickness is 60 cm and the entrance width in the western wall is 1.60 m (Alishov 2016 no. 1, p. 81) (Fig. 12.*1*).

Likewise, their is a church in the village of Jijikhan in the Balaken district. It measures 10.40 m in length and its the width is 5.90 m; moreover, the width of the church apse is 3.60 m and its length is 2.25 m. The wall thickness is 1 m and the width of the southern doorway is 2, 20 m. The width of the narthex located in the southern part of the monument is 3.60 m, its length is 5.25 m, the inside width is 3.90 m, and its length is 6.35 m. The width of the church's main door and the narthex was 2.10 m (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 81) (Fig. 12.*2*).

There is church in the courtyard of the Chynkhlylar family in the village of Chereki in the Balaken district. It measures 9.20 m in length and it has a width of 6.60 m. The width of the apse is 4.35 m, the length is 2 m, the wall thickness is 90 cm. The width of the entrance to the western wall is 1.20 m, the length inside is 5.40 m, and the width is 4.80 m. The width of the pilasters located next to each other along the central wall is 55 cm; the width of the assumed door at the southern wall is 1.35 m (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 82) (Fig. 12.*3*).

The Darvaz church in the village of Gazma in the Balaken district has intact northern and southern walls (with a length of 9.20 m). The width of the western wall along with the side pilasters is 7 m, the width of the apse is 4.82 m, the length is 2.50 m, and the width of the wall pilasters is 45 cm. There was a building resembling a narthex located at the entrance to the destroyed western part of the monument (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 82) (Fig. 13.*1*).

In the village of Gabakchel Shambul in Balaken district, on the territory of Isaklygirme, there is a church with a destroyed western end. The length of the northern and southern walls is 6.40 m, the length of the eastern wall is 6 m, the width of the apse is 3.90 m, and the length is 2.50 m. The width of the pilasters on the outside of the northern, southern and eastern walls is 25 cm, and their length is 1 m. The wall thickness is 80 cm, the length



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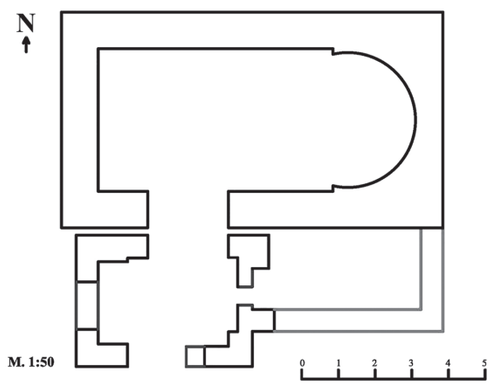

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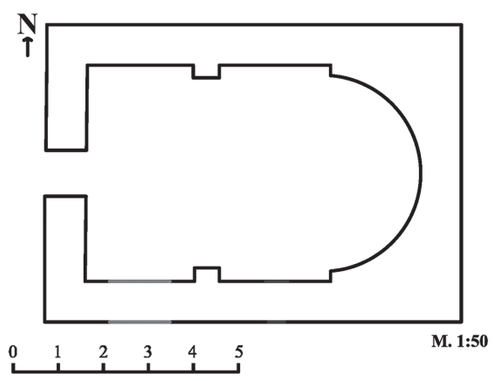

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Fig. 12. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Potchbina. 2. Jijikhan. 3. Gyaryakli

of the preserved walls is 3.50 m, the distance between the walls is 4.40 m (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 82) (Fig. 13.*2*).

On the territory of the Beretbina conservancy area in Zagatala district there is a church. It measures 8.80 m long and 6.35 m wide, its wall thickness is 90 cm. The width of the church apse is 4.30 m and the length is 3 m. The internal dimensions of the church are 3.70×4.50 m and the width of the western door is 1 m. At a distance of 25 cm from the western wall to the eastern, on the northern and southern walls there are ledges for candles, their width relative to the length is 23×23 cm (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 83) (Fig. 13.*3*).

On the territory of the conservancy area of the village of Khalatala in the Balaken district in the Chimen forest there was a church together with utility rooms in the northern area. The complex measures 7.65 m in length and has a width of 8.40 m. The width of the service room is 3.35 m, the length is 7.65 m, the internal length is 6.20 m, the width is 2.60 m, the wall thickness is 70 cm, the width of the entrance door inside the church is 1 m, and the width of the window aperture for interior lighting is 35 cm. The total width of the church itself is 5.10 m and the length is 7.65 m; the width of the apse is 3.04 m, the length is 2 m; the length of the nave is 4.25 m and the width is 3.60 m. The wall thickness is 75 cm, the width of the southern door is 1 m, and the width of the western door is 95 cm (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 83) (Fig. 14.*1*).

Besides plans with rectangular layouts, there were also discovered trapezoidal (or skewed) planned churches in the districts of Gakh, Zagatala, Balaken, and Gedabek. In the village of Zarna, Gakh region, there was recorded a church that was 5 m tall, with a wall thickness of 80 cm. The monument is built of rubble masonry, rubble masonrys and mortar. There were identified the differences during external field measurements of the church. For example, the width of the eastern area of the monument is 5 m, the western is 4.90 m, the length of the northern wall is 6.40 m, and the southern is 6.20 m. There is a difference of 20 cm between the northern and southern walls. The northern wall of the nave is 3.41 m long, the southern one is 3.28 m, and total width is 3.40 m. The apse is 1.90 m long in the eastern part and 2.90 m wide. A loophole shaped window for indoor lighting is found in the apse area. The niches, which are 65 cm wide and 80 cm high, were located in the southern and northern walls of the apse. Due to the fact that the western entrance was destroyed, it is impossible to determine its size. Based on the above parameters, there is clearly a trapezoidal (or skewed), rather than rectangular plan (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 121) (Fig. 14.*2*).

In the center of the Gakh district there is the Gakhbashi church, which is similar to other analogous monuments in terms of the methods used in the construction. Only the northern and southern walls with a thickness of 80 cm are extant. The upper ceiling of the monument is completely destroyed. The church was built mainly of rubble masonry and mortar.

Both walls are lined with roughly hewn stones. During examination carried out outside the monument, there was determined the length of the walls: eastern is 5.50 m, the western is 5.30 m, the southern is 7.50 m, and the northern is 7.35 m. The length of the nave near

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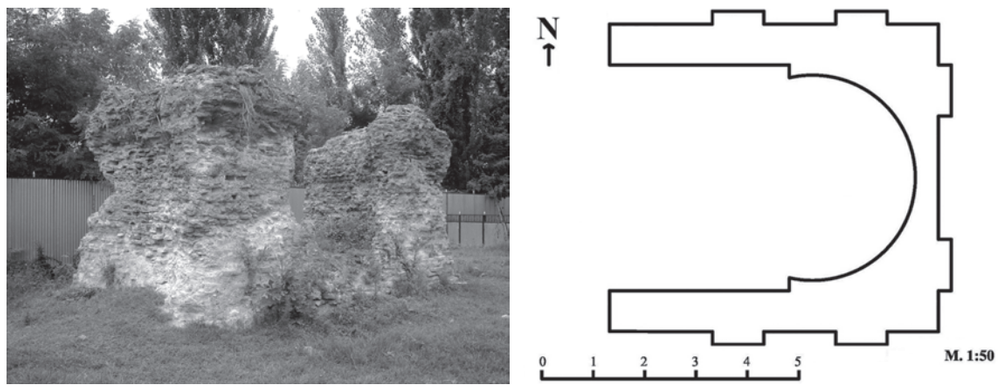

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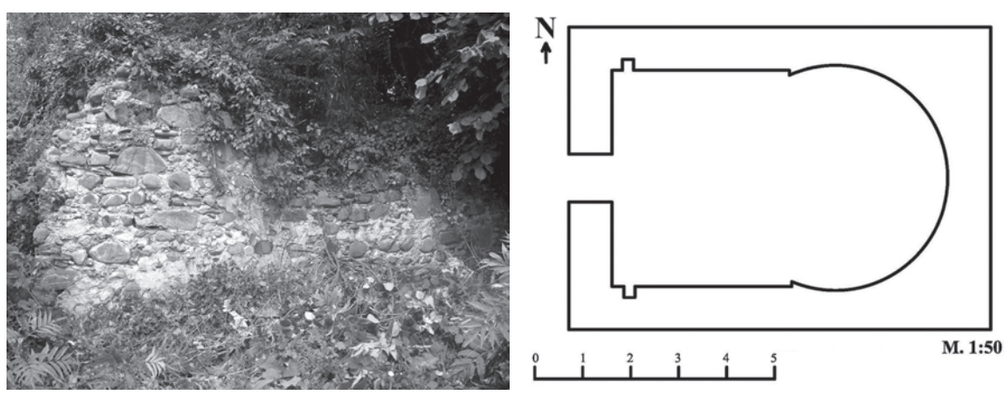

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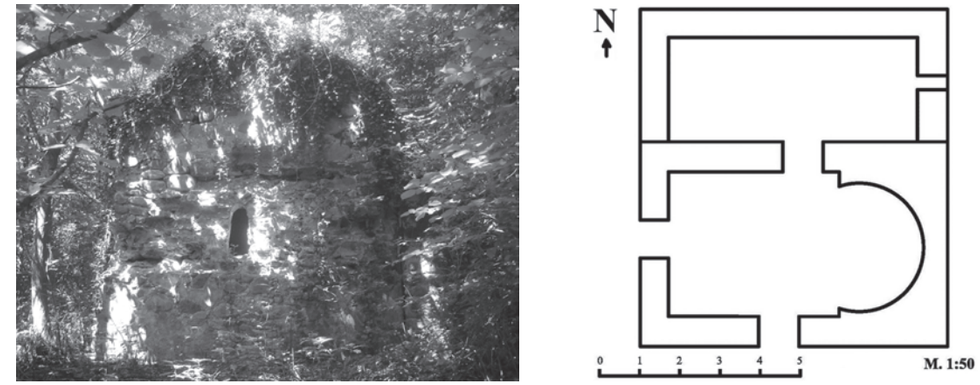
Fig. 13. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Darvaz. 2. Shambul. 3. Beritbina



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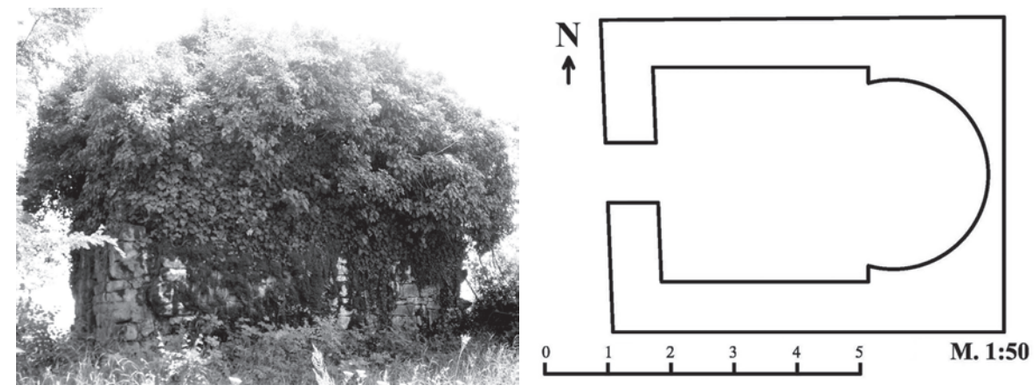

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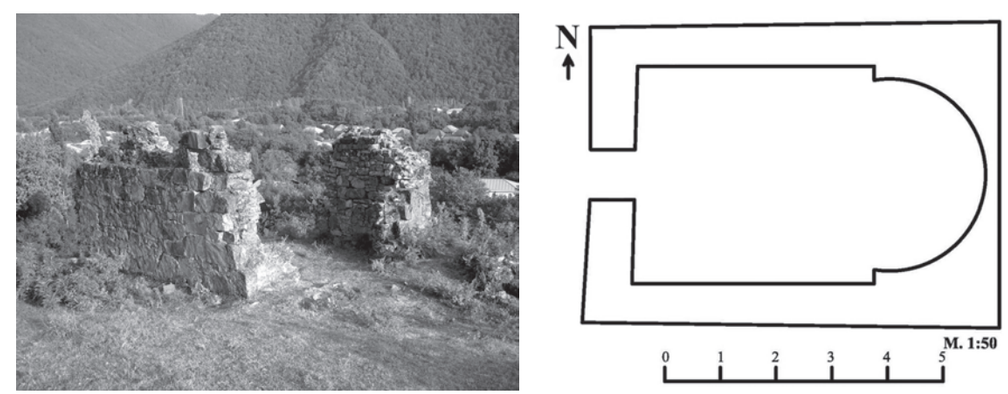

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Fig. 14. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Khalatala. 2. Zyarnya. 3. Gakhbashi

the northern wall is 4.25 m, near the southern is 4.35 m, and its width is 3.90 m. The width of the apse is 3.40 m and the length is 2 m. Since the western wall has not survived, it is difficult to determine the dimensions of the front door in the central area. Presumably, the width of the doorway of this church, as those mentioned earlier, was around 90 cm (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 121) (Fig. 14.*3*).

In the village of Ashagy Gullar in the Balaken district there was studied an Albanian Christian single-aisle church. The total length of the northern wall is 7 m, the southern wall is 7.23 m, the width of both end walls are 5.58 m. The thickness of the walls of the church is 60–70 cm, the width of the nave is 4.18 m, the length of the northern side is 3.82 m, and the southern side is 4 m. The width of the apse at the eastern wall in regard to the length is 3.85×2.30 m. The width of the eastern wall inside the church is 60 cm and the height is 1.20 m. In the southern wall, 60 cm west of the apse facade, there is an archway opening in the form of a loophole which is 70 cm wide and 1.30 m high. The monument is built mainly of rubble masonry and fired brick, which are characteristic of the Middle Ages, and all this was bonded using limestone mortar (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 121) (Fig. 15.*1*).

The Christian single-aisle church with a wall thickness of 65–85 cm was recorded in the upper part of the village of Ashagy Gullar in the Balaken district. During the measurements of the outer part of the church, there was determined the length of the northern wall which was 5.95 m, the southern wall was 6.05 m, and the eastern and western walls are 4.50 m. The length of the nave of the church near the northern wall is 2.96 m, near the southern wall is 3.05 m, and the width is 3.35 m. The width of the apse in regard to the length is 2.85×1.80 m. Inside the monument on the eastern, western and northern walls there are window openings in the shape of loopholes which are 50×60 cm in size. At the northern wall, 25 cm to the west of the apse and 1.05 m to the south, there are rectangular windows that are 30×20 cm in size. The width of the entrance door in the western wall is 1.05 m. In the apse area, 60 cm north of the apse facade and 80 cm north, there is a niche of 50×40 cm in size. At the southern wall, west of the apse facade at 1.60 m, there is a window in the form of a loophole which is 85 cm high and 55 cm wide. The edges of the doorway are 90 cm wide, as well as some parts of the church were built of brick with dimensions of 23×25×3 cm (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 15.*2*).

In the village of Garaja Bina in the Balaken district on a high hill of the forest site of Gadosh there is an Albanian Christian single-aisle monument. During external measurements, it was found that the northern wall has a length of 6.40 m, the southern – 6.30 m, the eastern – 5 m, the western – 4.90 m. The wall thickness of the monument is 90 cm; the length of the nave at the northern wall is 3.57 m, at the southern – 3.49 m; the inner length of the western wall is 3.10, the eastern – 3.20 m. The width of the apse relative to the length is 2.70×1.40 m. At the southern wall of the monument, 1.60 m from the apse facade there is a vaulted window opening which is 85 cm high and 55 cm wide. There are niches in the apse area of the church, at a distance 60 cm from the northern wall of the apse facade towards

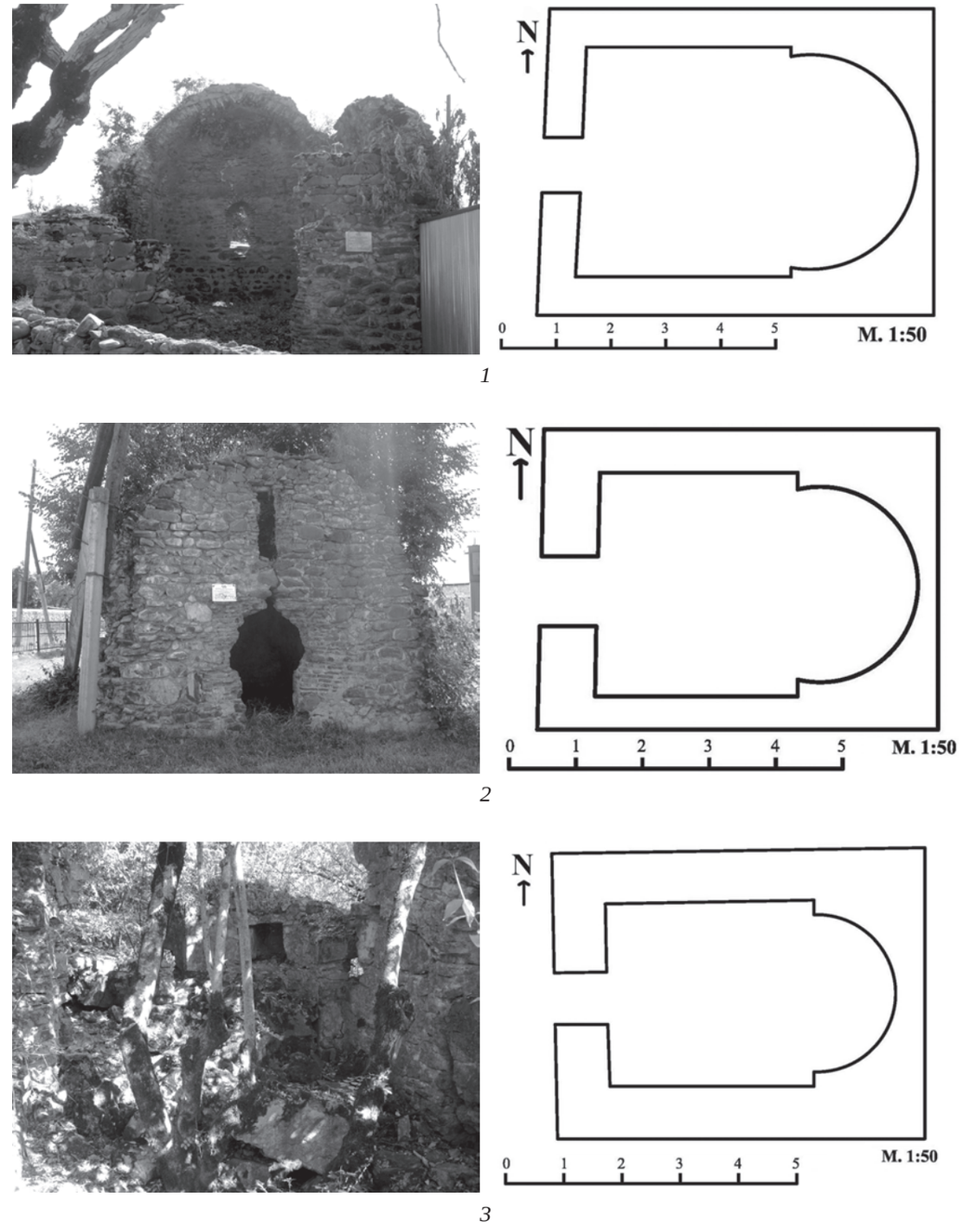


Fig. 15. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Ashagygullar. 2. Yukharygullar. 3. Garajabina

the east and 80 cm from the southern wall. The width of the entrance door, located in the western wall, is 90 cm. The monument was built using rubble masonry and lime mortar (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 99) (Fig. 15.*3*).

A monument was studied on the territory of Galakend of the Kedabek district, in the site of Shamlyg, on the right bank of Shamkir-Chai River. It was a single-aisle church which had a nave measuring 7.60×5.35 m. The width of the apse at the eastern side of the church was 2.70 m, and the length was 2.50 m. In addition, in the apse area there were pastophoria measuring 1.90 m in depth, with a width at the northern wall being 80 cm, and at the southern wall 90 cm.

The entrance to the pastophoria at the southern wall is 65 cm wide and 1 m above the base of the nave. From the pastophorion at the southern wall there was an entrance portal to the crypt, located under the altar. On the eastern side of the pastophorion, located near the northern wall, and on the southern side of the other pastophorion there were window openings in the form of loopholes for interior lighting. In the nave of the church there were three pilasters made of rubble masonry emerging from the southern and northern walls, and towering 1.70 m from the base, they were vaulted and linked at the side walls.

The door of the church in the southern wall is located 1.85 m from the apse step and has a width of 1.10 m. The monument which is 1–1.20 m thick was built of rough stones and rubble masonry; the height of its western end is 6.50 m. The once-vaulted ceiling is completely destroyed except for the pastophoria. Windows are in the shape of loopholes which are 50 cm wide and 1.20 m high and survive on the western wall of the monument. It is likely that there was also a window with similar dimensions in the eastern wall. The church in general has a trapezoid plan, the southern wall is 10 cm lower than the northern one (11.69×11.59) (Alishov 2013, no. 1, pp. 134–135) (Fig. 16.*1*).

In the forested region of the Gedabek district, north-east of the village of Galakend, there is the Jovdu Church. The thickness of its walls is 1.05 m, the length of the nave near the northern wall is 4.35 m, and at the southern wall it is 4.25 m. The internal width of the monument is 3.20 m. The length of the apse, in relation to the width, is 2.70×2.80 m. At a height of 1.10 m from the level of the destroyed floor of the apse on the northern and southern walls there were niches with dimensions of 40×50 and 55×60 cm, respectively.

For interior lighting, there are window openings in the form of loopholes: at the eastern wall which is 80 cm wide and 1.70 m high; and at the western wall the window is 40 cm wide and 60 cm high. The door of the monument is located in the southern wall at a distance of 1.95 m from the western one. Its width is 1.05 m. The roof was vaulted and was built of rubble masonrys, hewn limestone, and lime mortar. At about 85 cm to the west of the apse, on the northern and southern walls, opposite each other there are pilasters measuring 25×10 cm, which form an arch over the interior. In addition, at the western and southern walls of the church there were recorded three small rooms, from which only the foundations remained intact (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 135) (Fig. 16.*2*).

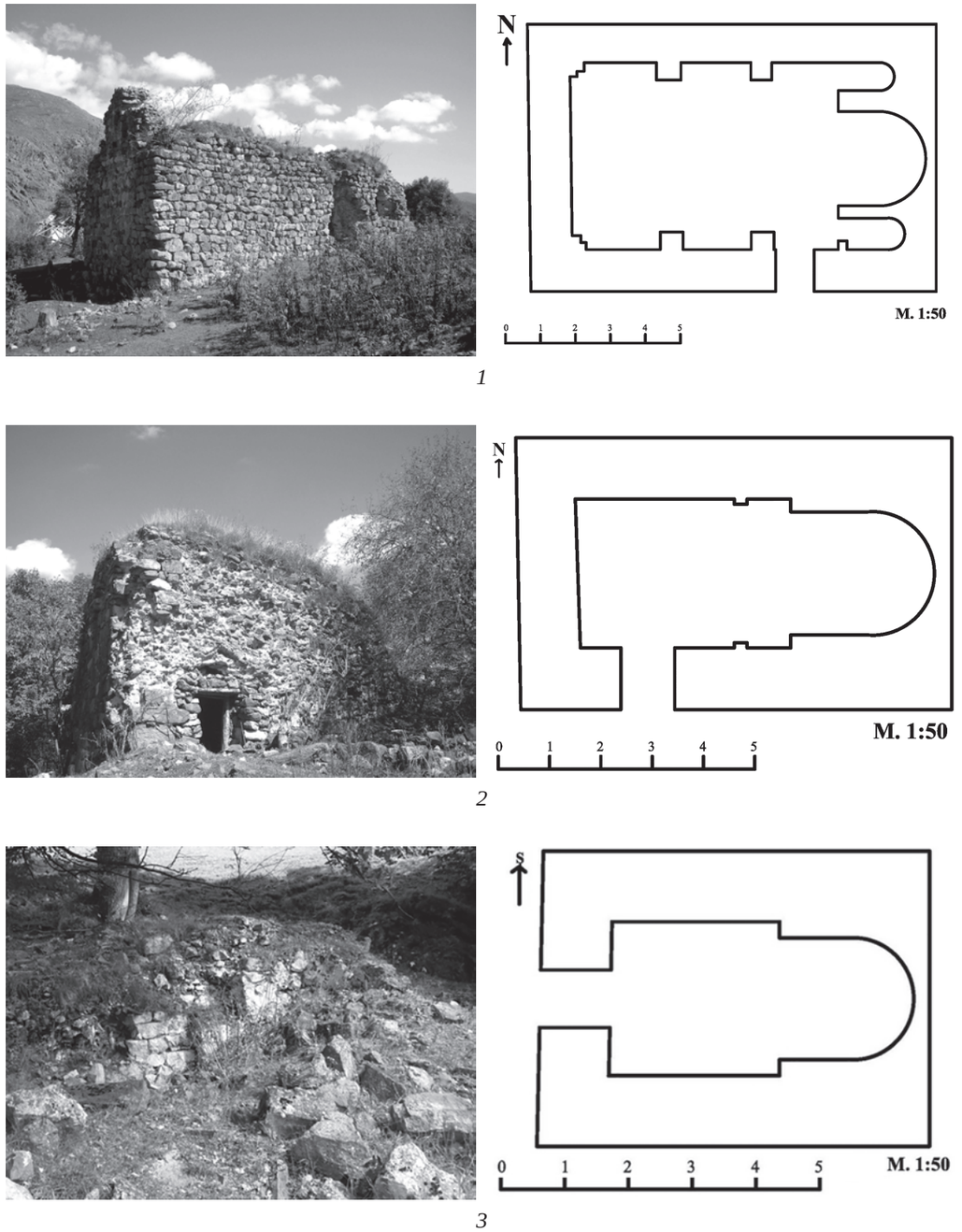


Fig. 16. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Galakend. 2. Govdu. 3. Arabachi

The church of Gyzylkilse on the territory of Keroglu Gayasy of the village of Arabachi in the Kedabek district was examined. The monument is located on the southwestern slope of the cliff. The church is built of roughly hewn stones and the thickness of its walls is 1.10 m. The length of the apse relative to the width is 1.90×2.10 m. The width of the nave is 2.50 m, the length of the northern wall from the inside is 2.62 m, and the length of the southern wall from the inside is 2.70 m. The church has a trapezoidal layout, the outer length of its northern wall is 6.05 m, the southern is 6.15 m, and the total width is 4.60 m. The entrance to the church is 90 cm wide and is located in the western wall (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 136) (Fig. 16.*3*).

A survey was carried out at the monument of Agkilse in the village of Novoivanovka (Michetka). The length of the apse is 2.90 m, its width is 3.15 m, and the width of the nave is 3.30 m and the length of the northern wall is 2.80 m and the southern wall is 2.25 m. Near the southern wall, at a distance of 1 m east of the apse facade, there was a niche measuring 70×70 cm. The wall thickness is 1.20 cm, and the width of the doorway near the western wall is 90 cm, and the height is 1.60 m.

For interior lighting there is a window above the doorway in the form of a loophole which is 1.10 m wide and 1.65 m tall. The measurements taken from the outside of the monument showed the following results: length of the eastern wall is 5.70 m, the western is 5.60 m, the northern is 7.33 m, and the southern wall is 7.70 m. G. G. Mammadova, having studied the monument, noted that, taking into account the plan and construction, it has a design common to other churches in the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan. However, in comparison with them it has a larger scale (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 137) (Fig. 17.*1*).

On the territory called Murguztala, in the village of Khanifa in Balaken district, there is a trapezoidal church. The northern wall of the church is 9.72 m long, the southern wall is 9.50 m, the eastern wall is 5.90 m, the western wall is 6 m. The width of the apse is 3.90 m, the length is 2.75 m, the wall thickness is 80 cm, the width of the nave is 4.38 m, and the length is 5.55 m. In the central part of the northern and southern walls there are two pilasters which are 65 cm wide; the width of the entrance from the western side is 1 m (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 17.*2*).

The surviving church was studied in the village of Gerekli in Balaken district. The eastern end is designed with horseshoe-shape plan, and the lengths of the northern and southern walls are 5.30 m. The length of the western wall is 5.25 m, the thickness of the walls are 75 cm, the entrance width is 1.50 m, and the apse is relatively deep measuring 3.60×2.50 m. Inside the church, the width of the western wall is 3.60 m and the apse is 3.80 m. The length of the northern and southern walls of the nave is 3.60 m (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 17.*3*).

The construction of trapezoidal churches was widespread within Albania. One of them was the church of Dastafur situated on the territory of the Dashkesan district. Two colonades (with three columns) forms a three-aisle plan (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 18.*1*).

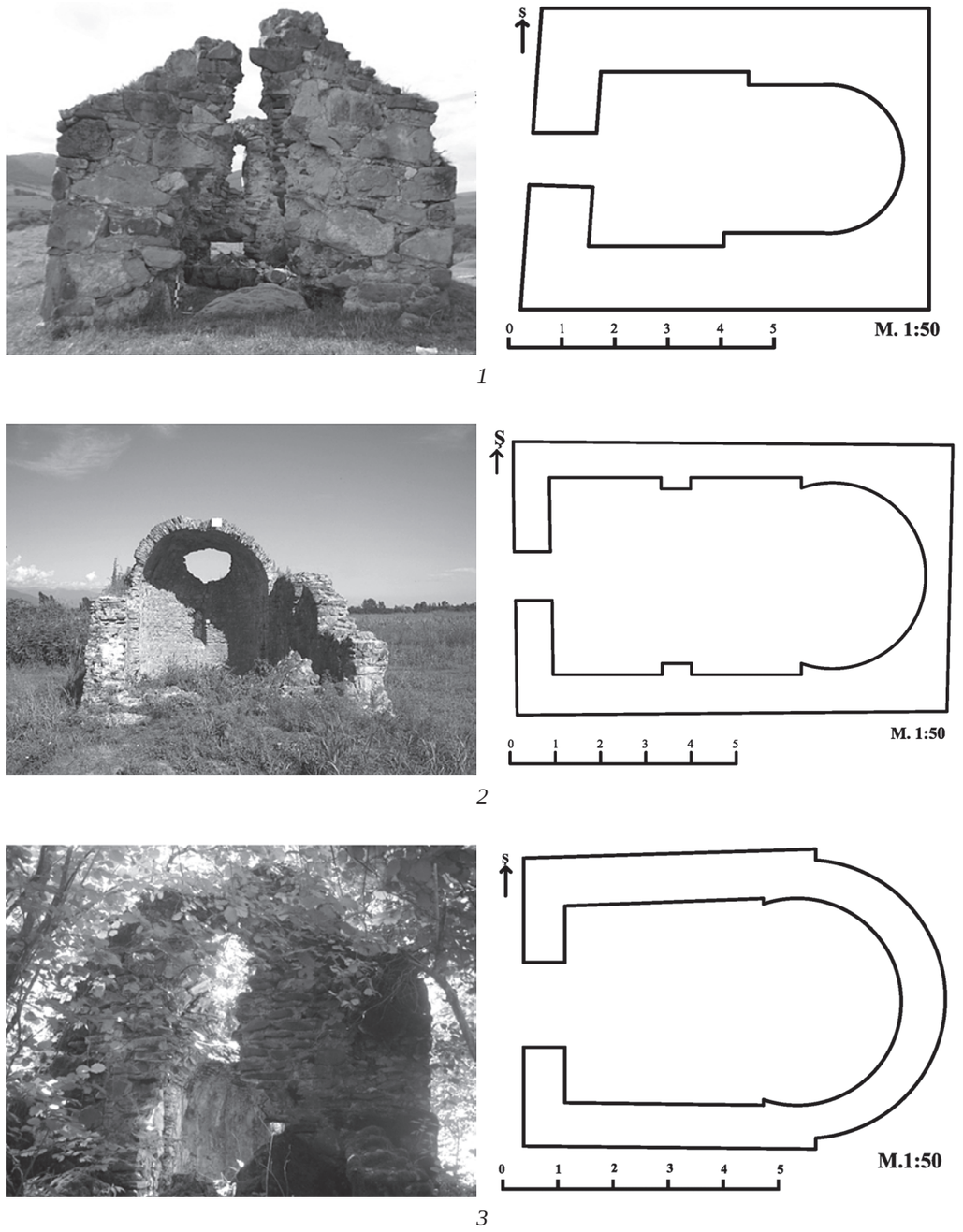


Fig. 17. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Agkilse (Michetka). 2. Murguztala. 3. Dagylmayan

On the territory of the village of Beyuk Garamurad of the Kedabek district there is the 13th century Khamshivan church. The inscription on the southern wall indicates that King Hasan I's son, Grigor, established it in the year 1211. This elongated rectangular church has a length of 15.6 m, a width of 9.80 m, and its apse is semicircular. Two columns and pilsasters protruding from the walls form a three-aisle vaulted baslica. The illumination of the church was provided by three windows within the east wall and two windows in the three other walls (Mamedova 2004, pp. 111–112) (Fig. 18.*2*).

The Kurmuk church in the Gakh region was built on the ruins of an ancient Albanian ediface. The length of this quadrangular building is 13.6 m and the width is 8.80 m. Historical sources report that in the 13th to 14th centuries it functioned as a monastery for men. During archaeological excavations, it was discovered that the building was subjected to four different phases of restoration throughout history: the first phase dates to the 1st–3rd centuries; the second phase belongs to the 4th–7th centuries; the third, 8th–11th centuries; and the fourth phase to the 19th century (Karimov et al. 2007, pp. 23–28) (Fig. 18.*3*).

The Chanakhchi Church is located in a monastery located at the northeast foot of the Chobandag mountain range of the Kedabek District. It has a complex architectural history and design. The wall thickness of the monument is 1.20 m, the length of the nave in regard to the width is 9.75×5.20 m; the length of the apse area relative to the width is 2.85×3.80 m. The monument is divided into seven bays within by means of three pilasters parallel to each other (45×50 cm) located on the northern and southern walls.

The door of the monument is in the southern wall at a distance of 2.50 m from the western wall, and has a width of 90 cm, a height of 2 m. For lighting, within all four walls of the church there are window openings in the form of loopholes. At the western wall of the monument, a room measuring 5.20 m wide and 6.15 m long was examined. This room has a vaulted ceiling. The door with a width of 90 cm is located on the southern wall. It connects the room with a 3 m wide corridor that leads from west to east. Half of the corridor, connecting in a vaulted way with the side wall of the main building, continued along with columns with a diameter and a distance of 1 m between each other, including the entrance door of the monastery. Part of the 6.70-meter-long corridor had walls that are 1.20 m wide, while the remaining 9.80 m was held up by five round columns.

The total length of the church is 21.50 m, its width from the eastern wall is 7.60 m, and from the western is 11.80 m. In the southeastern part of the monument, there is another structure for religious ceremonies. The monument most preserved. The Chanakhchi church, built of rubble masonry, is surrounded by a wall which is one meter tall and 30 m wide. The width of the churchyard is 30 m and its length is more than 80 m. There were recorded several service buildings located around the monument (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 137) (Fig. 19.*1*).

There is a completely destroyed church in the site of Kilse Deresi on the territory of Yenikend, Kedabek district, which was surveyed by experts. The thickness of the walls of the monument varies between 1.20 and 1.30 m. The approximate length of the apse relative to

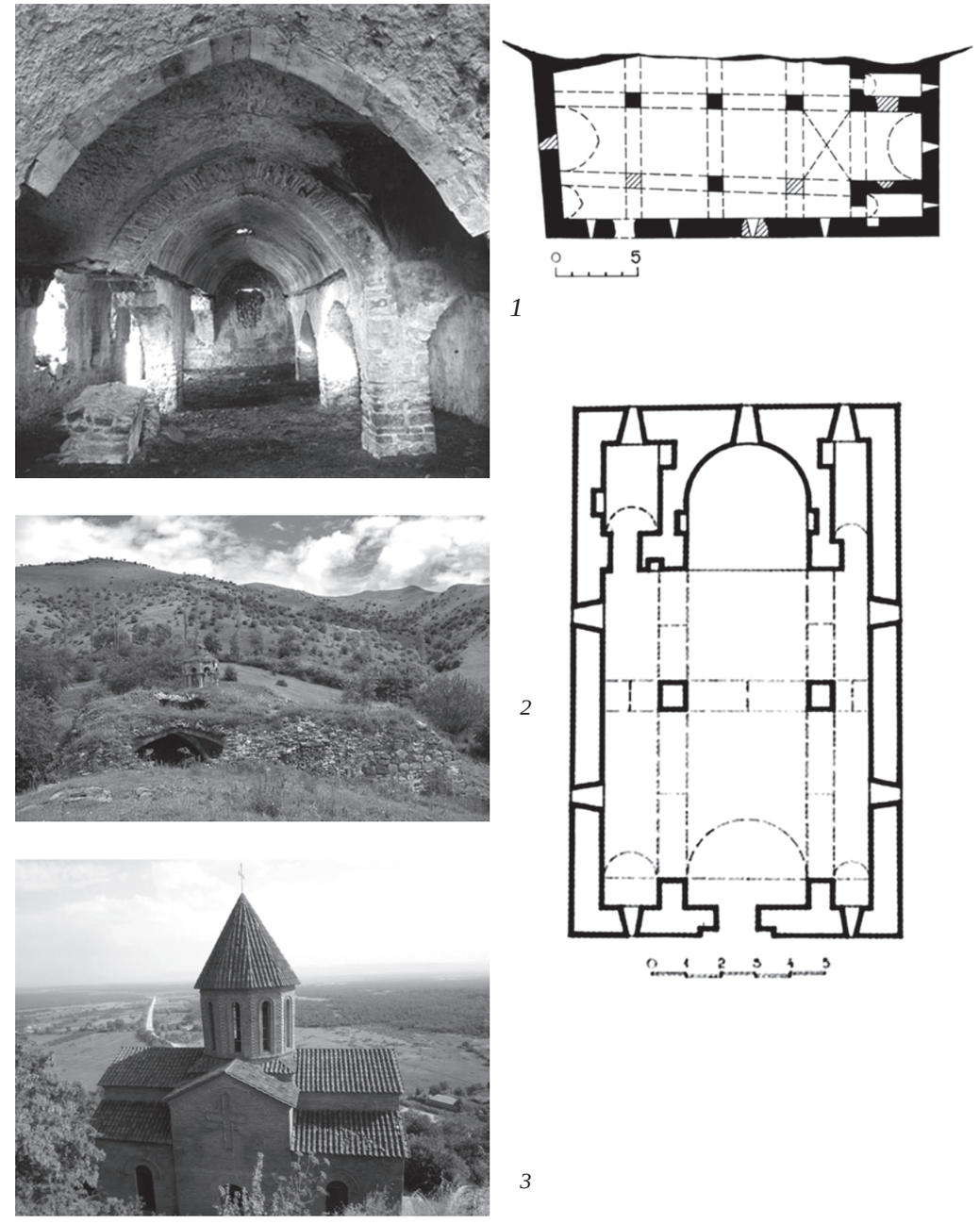
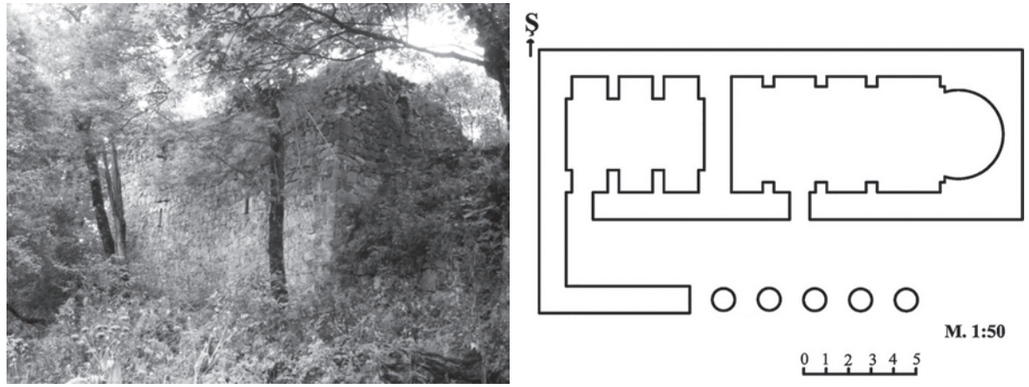


Fig. 18. Photo and plan of the churches: 1. Dastafur. 2. Khamshivank. 3. Kurmuk



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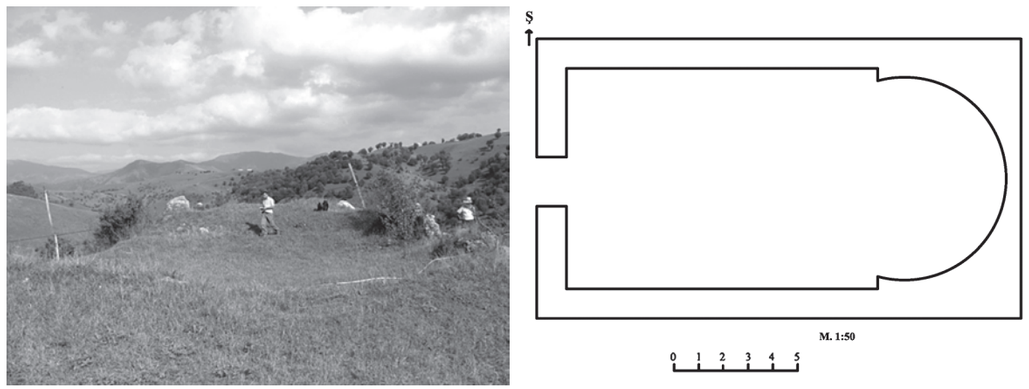

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Fig. 19. Photo and plan of the monasteries. 1. Chanagchi. 2. Yenikend. 3. Chaldash

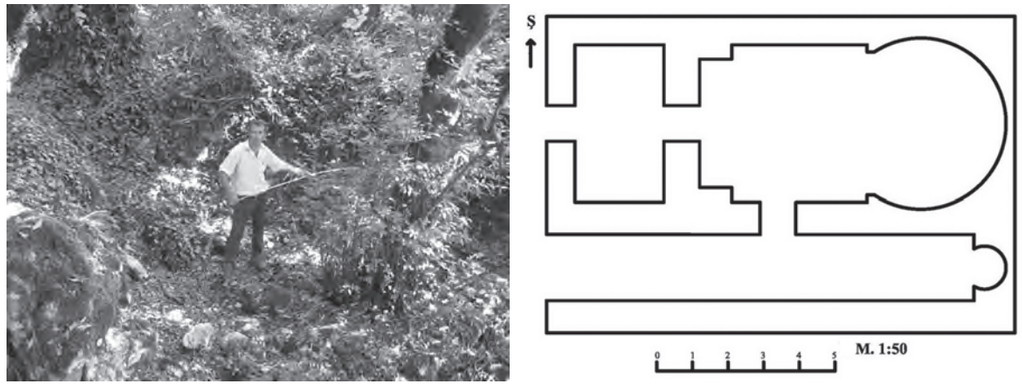
its width is 8×5.20 m. The length of the nave relative to the width is 12.60×8.95 m. The 2 m wide entrance is located in the western wall. Around the monument there is a cemetery. Based on the architectural features of the church, it is possible to date its construction to the 11th–13th centuries (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 137) (Fig. 19.*2*).

The architectural measurements were made at the monument in the village of Chaldash in the Kedabek district. Its wall had a thickness of 1.10 m. The width of the apse with respect to its length is 3.30×2.90 m. On the northern and southern sides of the apse there were 2 m long by 95 cm wide pastophoria. The width of the nave of the monument is 5.90 m and the length is 8.70 m. The 1.10-m wide entrance door is located in the western wall. Pilasters with dimensions of 25×75 cm are located along the walls of the nave on both sides. The church was built with rubble masonry and lime mortar. Based on the preserved semi-dome of the apse, it is possible to conclude that the ceiling of the church's nave had a similar construction (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 137) (Fig. 19.*3*).

In th northeastern area of the village of Zarna in the Gakh district, on the elevated territory of La (Lal)-Shirin, there stands the monastery church built inside the fortress walls, typical of the early Middle Ages. The total length of this church-monastery, built in the east-west direction, is 12.95 m, the width is 8.85 m, and its wall thickness varies between 80 and 90 cm. The monument is divided inside into four areas. One meter from the western entrance there is a small room [possibly serving as a narthex] which is 2.50 m long and 4.40 m wide. The nave of the church is separated from this room by a wall that is 90 cm wide. In the center of this wall there is a one-meter wide entrance door that leads to the nave. The length of the nave is 4.50 m and its width is 4.40 m; the width of the apse at the eastern end relative to the length is 4×3.90 m. The total length of the southern wall of the main church building is 12.85 m. It has a doorway that is one-meter wide which leads to a fourth area that has a width of 1.85 m [which served as a parecclesia or pastophorion]. The eastern part of this area [from the door to the eastern wall] is 6.15 m leading to a vaulted niche [or apse] 1.05 m wide and 90 cm long. The remaining part of this chamber is 6.65 m (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 98) (Fig. 20.*1*).

The Airivank church is located in the village of Kedabek district, on a high forest hill on the left bank of the river Airi. Research conducted by G. G. Mamedova revealed that the monument was 7.50 m long and 3.70 m wide. The only entrance was in the western wall. The thickness of the walls of the sanctuary area is 1.10 m, while narthex's wall thickness is 95 cm. Mamedova, recognizing features characteristic inherent in churches of the 9th–10th centuries, suggested that pastophoria flanked the bema to the south and north (Mamedova 2004, p. 86–87) (Fig. 20.*2*).

In subsequent periods, another monument was erected near Jalut. This Udi (Caucasian Albanian) Christian church was a three-aisle complex with two-storeyed pastophoria to the right and left of the apse (Fig. 20.*3*). This single-aisle church of Jalut, typical of the Middle Ages, is located on a hill in the northeastern part of the Oguz district. The scholar



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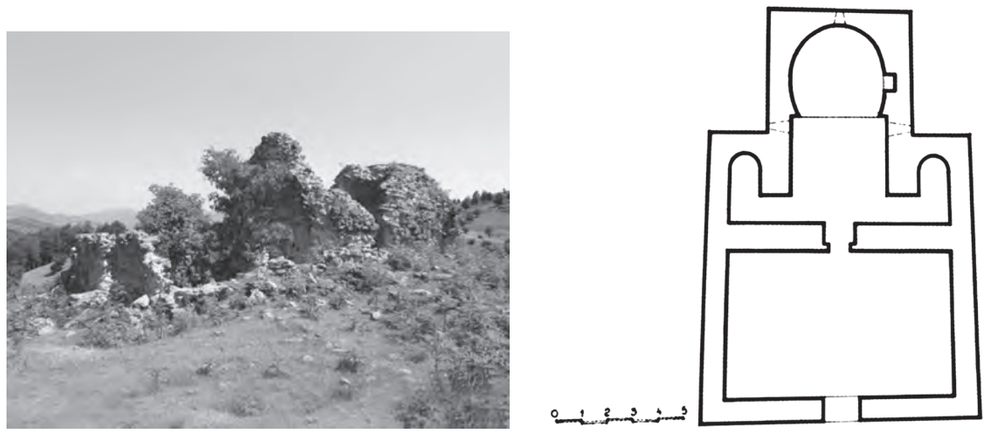

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Fig. 20. Photo and plan of the monasteries: 1. Zarna. 2. Airivank. 3. Jalut

G. G. Mamedova carried out architectural studies of the church, resulting in these measurements: the nave is 6.40 m in length and the apse is 3.65×1.75 m. The western and eastern walls of the church stand at 2 to 2.6 m high and are well preserved. The walls exhibit various kinds of stone, fired bricks, materials mixed with mortar, as well as evidence of construction and restoration work carried out in different periods. Based on the results available at that time, the author attributed the latest construction work to the 13th century (Mamedova 2004, p. 39–40).

The church situated on Kaziyev Street in the city of Oguz, which is currently functioning as a local history museum, represents another Christian monument of the Middle Ages. This one-domed church is built of volcanic tuffa and mortar. It has a length of 15 m, a width of 9 m, and a height of 10 m; the entrance is located in the western wall. Access from the pastophoria to the second storey and gallery is obtain from a staircase. The church was lit by four large and two small windows. A bell tower, supported by six columns, was located above the church (Alishov 2016 no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 21.*1*).

On Nakhchivani Street in the city of Oguz, on the territory of the old hospital, there is an inactive three-aisle Albanian-Udi church with a west-to-east orientation. It is built of ashlar, rubble masonry, and fired brick. From the north and south, it was illuminated by five large and four semi-oval windows. Flanking the apse there were two-storeyed pastophoria for the priests to use. The ceiling between the aisles is vaulted. The church has a length of 23 m, a width of 13 m and a height of about 10 m, its entrances are in the western and southern walls (Alishov 2016, no. 1, p. 122) (Fig. 21.*2*).

The Gyzylvank Monastery in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic is of great interest. V. M. Sysoyev, who studied the monument in 1928, wrote that there are 18 frescoes with religious images on its walls. Out of these, eight are on the inner columns and ten are on the vaulting. According to him, the monument was established in the 5th century. Upon the foundations of the previous building, a new building was constructed during the 13th century, and later in the 17th century the was a general renovation. Currently, the monument is mostly preserved (Mamedova 2004, pp. 134–135) (Fig. 21.*3*).

At the center of the village of Novosaratovka in the Kedabek district, we analyzed a church with a wall thickness of 1.20 m. The length of the apse relative to its width is approximately 3.80×3.80 m. To the right and to the left of the apse there were 4.40 m long and 2.50 m wide pastophoria. There were niches 60×60 cm in size at 1.60 m east of the apse's facade near the northern wall and at a distance of 1.70 m from the southern wall. The length of the nave is 12.50 m and its width is 9 m. The total dimensions of the monument are 18.24×11.50 m.

G. G. Mamedova also conducted research in the church of Novosaratovka. Taking into account the uncharacteristic location of the entrance to the eastern wall, she came to the conclusion that, from the south, the church had an annex or a parecclesia connected to it. Roughly hewn stones of different types were used in the construction of the church,

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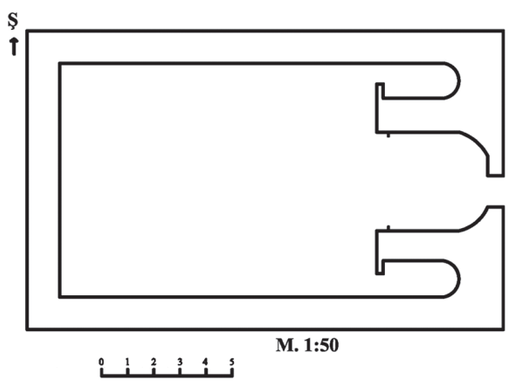

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Fig. 21. 1. Oghuz district, Nakhchyvanly Street. 2. Oghuz historical and local center. 3. Gyzylvank church. 4. The church of Novosaratovka. 5. Plan of the church of Novosaratovka

and fired brick was used to construct the semi-dome for the apse (Mamedova 2012, p. 45–46) (Fig. 21.*4–5*).

On the territory of the village of Poladly, Kedabek district, there is an Albanian Christian church with its upper walls and roof that has completely disappeared. Within the courtyard, to the south-west of the church, there were grave monuments over more than a hundred Christian burials. The church is built of stone and mortar. The width of its apse is 2.65 m and its length is 3 m. From the apse there are entrances to the pastophoria located at the north and south walls. In the south pastophorion, which has been destroyed to the level of the ground, there remains some traces within the dirt. At the north pastophorion, its vaulting is completely missing. The length of the pastophoria is 3.30 m from the inside and their width is 1.30 m to the east, and 1.20 m to the west. It should be noted that during the construction, the sizes of the pastophoria were intended to be the same. The width of the church from the inside is 3.60 m, the length of the nave's the north wall is 8.30 m, and the south wall is 8.40 m. The thickness of the church walls varies between 1.10 and 1.40 m. The entrance has a width of 1.45 m and is located in the southwall at a distance of 1.30 m from the apse's facade (Fig. 22.*1*).

Another monument located in the Kedabek region is the monastery complex of Makhras. This monument includes 27 to 28 buildings. There are defensive ramparts around it. An bell tower, supported by eight columns, was built from stone and fired bricks. To the right of the bell tower there is a residential complex of nine rooms (cells), to the left there is a single-chambered building. Nearby are apartments, consisting of four rooms, that are located to the west of the main church building, and one large structure with seven rooms, and other outbuildings are located to the east. A water tunnel was built on the left bank of the Shamkir River, and this formed a hidden passage from a mill and the river to the monastic complex. To the north-east of the main church, beyond the perimeter of the fortified walls there is a crypt called the "Besh Garadash". The main church had three aisles and a narthex, and these exhibit a variety of construction techniques. The narthex is lined with ashlars inside and out, while the walls of the aisles and apse are constructed mainly of roughly-hewn ashlar and river stones; the inner columns and ceiling were built with fired bricks. The pastophoria are located to the right and left of the apse. Since two graves were buried under the apse, who were presumably members of the clergy, the overlying smooth black stone that was installed over their graves can be interpreted as a tombstone. Local people who visit this place today call it the "Garadash Feast" (Fig. 22.*2*).

On the territory of the village of Gabagtepe in the Dashkesan district, there is a Christian monument with a peculiar architectural form. The three-aisle church was built with large irregular stones. The inner and outer walls bear marks of deliberate human destruction (Fig. 22.*3*).

Another monument was studied within a forested massif, located at the administrative territory of the village of Bayan, within the Dashkesan district. This is a monastery complex

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Fig. 22. 1. Photographs: Poladly church. 2. Monastery of Makhras. 3. Gabagtepe church. 4. Monastery of Bayan. 5. Bayan II church. 6. Chovdar church

with a defensive wall and, in some places, it has disappeared down to the ground level. The single-aisle church has a pastophorion at the north wall and a bell tower supported by seven columns. The entrance was at the south wall, while there was a narthex beyond the west wall, of which its masonry was not bonded to the rest of the church building. The area adjacent to the monument is approximately equal to a hectare. In addition to the church, nearby there is one outbuilidng and, in the surrounding region, are seven villages (Fig. 22.*4*).

In the central part of the village of Bayan, Dashkesan district, on a steep rock there is a three-aisle church and a chapel located close to each other. At a distance of 500 m from this monument, at the foot of the mountain, there were found numerous tombstones of belonging to the Christian era (Fig. 22.*5*).

Within the administrative territory of the village of Jovdar, Dashkesan district, there is a single-aisle Albanian monument high up in the forested area of the mountains. Although parts of the church have disapppeared, it is mostly preserved. Within the church's courtyard there are over ten areas where there are traces of buildings, perhaps for agricultural use (Fig. 22.*6*).

Another monastery complex in the Dashkesan district is located in the village of Gushchu. This monument consists of the main church building, the narthex (which is not bonded to the main structure), and a nearby bell tower. There were pastophoria at the north and south sides of the apse. The ceiling was vaulted and the walls are plastered on the inside (Fig. 23.*1*).

There are two more Christian monuments on the administrative territory of Zeilik village in the Dashkesan district. The first of them is a three-aisle church, located in the village's center, and to some extent it was dismantled by human efforts (Fig. 23.*2*). The second one is situated in the area called Aran Zeilik. It was a basilica with a total length of 26 to 28 m, with a width of 12 to 13 m. The monument is constructed of rubble masonry and fired bricks (Fig. 23.*3*).

The Great Aran Monastery is located on the right bank of the Khachen River, in the northern part of the village of Kolatag, in the territory of the Kelbajar district.[5] The inscription on the oldest *khachdash* (stone crosses) that used in the construction of the church dates back to the year 853.[6] As such, the inscription indicates that the monastery was rebuilt by Hasan-Jalal Vakhtang and Khorishe Khatun. Another inscription here records: "I, Khorishakh, the wife of Vakhtang, Khachen ruler, the daughter of the great Sargis, the sister of Zakaria and Ivane, rebuilt the Great Aran Church in [the year] 1212". After this restoration, the monastery was renovated in 1691. Thus, the monastery complex was built and maintained

[5] Editor's Note: This site is better known as Hakobavank (or Metsaranits Monastery) by English-speaking scholars.

[6] Editor's Note: In English scholarship these stone crosses are referred to as *khachkars* since their form and style originated among Armenian-speaking Christians. Whether Albanian Caucausians had an earlier and separate tradition of making stone crosses remains an open question and requires systematic research by impartial scholars.

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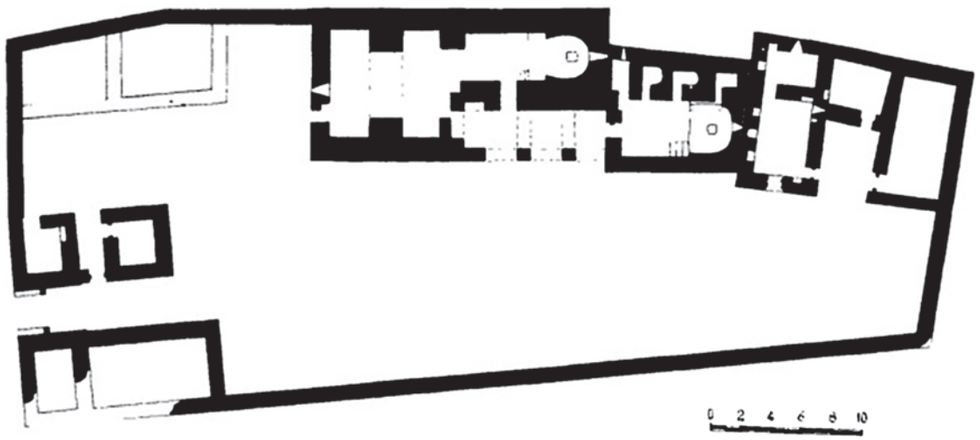

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Fig. 23. 1. Gushchu church. 2. Zeilik church. 3. Aran Zeilik church. 4. Great Aran monastery. 5. Plan of the Great Aran monastery

between the 9th to the 18th centuries; its main areas were built in the 12th–13th centuries. The monastery complex consists of two churches, two narthexes, settlements connected to the defensive walls, and domestic structures. All these outbuildings were connected to each other by a common entrance.

The first church built here was a rectangular single-aisle building, which had an apse platform elevated at a higher level than the floor of the nave. Stairs were attached to south wall in order to enter the bema. Between the church and the north wall were three chambers with dimensions of 1.30×1.30 m, which opened into the nave. The easternmost chamber is has a floor that is at a higher elevation than the apse (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 25). Movses Kaghankatvatsi noted, in the *History of the Albanians*, that the supporter of the monophysites – the bishop of the Khovel Great Aran Monastery – kept a document on the non-acceptance of Dyophysitism which was signed by the Albanian Catholicos Nerses Bakur. He kept this record for 14 years until his death.

This fact once again proves that there is a difference between the Dyophysite and Monophysite churches regarding the height of their bemas, and that is the main reason, as hypothesized here, in describing the apse's elevation at the Great Aran monastery (Kalankatuklu, 2006, pp. 186, 247) (Fig. 23.*4, 5*).

The Sakhra Monastery is located three kilometers northeast of the village of Kiçan in the Agdam district, at the foot of a mountain. It consists of two churches, a narthex, an ecclesiastical kitchen, a dormitory for monks, and a cemetery. The oldest inscription here is on the surface of a *khachdash* dating back to 1191. The main monument of the Sakhra monastery is the main church in the north-eastern part of the complex. Its architecture is significant. Narrow side aisles lead to the pastophoria, which have one window each. The apse of the church and the pastophoria are horseshoe-shaped in the ground plan. The walls of the church are constructed of roughly hewn stones and and are plastered inside. There are seven niches embedded in the surfaces of the inside walls. Of all the churches in the Karabakh region, this monument is unique for the transition from the apse to the crypt which is vaulted. This form is also visible at the western end. The second church was located in the southern part of the complex. It was vaulted too. Based on the existing inscription, it is known that the church was restored in the middle of the 18th century. A rectangular pastophorion was positioned between its northern wall and the earlier church (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 30) (Fig. 24.*1*).

At a distance of 8 kilometers from the village of Chapar, in the Kelbajar district, there is the monastery, consisting of one large and one small church, a narthex, and a paracclesion (chapel). The churches and chapel are rectangular in plan and the narthex is square. The whole complex is built of roughly or unhewn stone, and only the doors, windows and in a few areas places were constructed from well-carved stone. The church and the chapel have the same architectural construction, but they have separate chambers and doors. The apses are also rectangular and they have windows in the center of the their eastern

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Fig. 24. Photo and plan of the monasteries. 1. Sakhra. 2. Chapar. 3. Tug

wall. According to the inscriptions on a nearby *khachdash*, the monument dates back to the 10th–13th centuries (Mkrtchyan 1989, p. 46) (Fig. 24.*2*).

In the Khojavand district, in the northeast of the Tug mountains, in a dense forest there is a monastery with a dome, which is visible from afar. During the 13th century, the Dizak melikdom added a second structure to the church. According to epigraphic information

located on the northern wall, the monument was rennovated in the 13th century. The restoration work was started by two priests of the Amaras monastery in 1241 and completed in 1248 (Mkrtchyan 1989, pp. 67–71) (Fig. 24.*3*).

In the forest territory of the village of Pashan, Zagatala district, we investigated a chapel. It measures 4.80×3.20 m and its wall thickness is 50–60 cm. The length of the nave at the northern wall to the apse is 2.65 m and, at the southern wall, is 2.40 m long. The width of the nave is 2.20 m and the width of the apse is 1.40 m; note that the length from north to south wall varies between 1.671.86 m. The atrium (or courtyard) at the western end had a trapezoidal plan and its entrance was 90 cm wide. There were acoustic vessels with a diameter of 30 cm and an internal depth of 50 cm that were horizontally placed on the northern and southern walls of the apse. Windows were constructed for interior lighting in the eastern and southern walls of the monument. Outside, they looked like loopholes, and inside they were 30×20 cm in size. The vaulting was built of rubble masonry, and the inside is lined with lime mortar and plaster that was applied to the surface (Alishov 2013, no. 1, pp. 98–99) (Fig. 25.*1-2*).

A chapel was built in the courtyard in the village of Muxax in the Zaqatala district, in which the architectural parameters coincide with the Pashan chapel (mentioned above). A mosque was constructed adjacent to the western side of the chapel – this, once again, indicates religious changes that took place in this territory in history (Alishov 2013, no. 1, p. 99) (Fig. 25.*3,4*).

The church of St. Thomas stands in Yuxarı Əylis village, Ordubad district, within the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic.[7] It has a rectangular shape (26×20 m) and its height is 10 m tall. Inside the church there are four piers that support the dome. The entrances are located on the western, southern, and northern walls. At the front of the western and northern entrances there are narthexes supported by four piers. At the southern wall at a distance of 1–2 m there is a building corresponding to the entrance. On the southern, northern and eastern walls of the church there are three windows, and in the western part there are two windows in the form of loopholes. According to legend, the construction of the church was associated with the name of the Apostle Thomas. Supposedly, he led missionary work in the region. Later the Apostle Bartholomew, who was also here on a mission, having known about the death of Thomas in India, built this chapel in honor of his memory here. Later, this chapel was turned into a monastery (*Izvestija Azkomstarisa* 1929, no. 4, pp. 154–159).

There is a monastery situated on a small hill one kilometer south of the village of Danagyrt, Ordubad district. The church itself is small in size: its length is 15 m, its width is 6 m, and its height is 5 m. There are pilasters on the northern and southern walls. The ceiling of the building is vaulted and its foundations are brick. At the southern wall, close to the altar, there is a building like a chapel. The upper part of the church is heavily damaged.

[7] Editor's Note: This village is better known to English-speaking scholars as *Agulis*.

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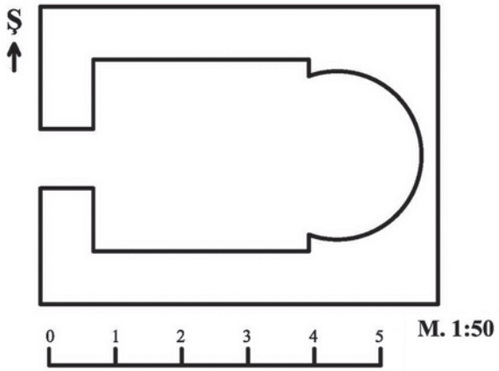

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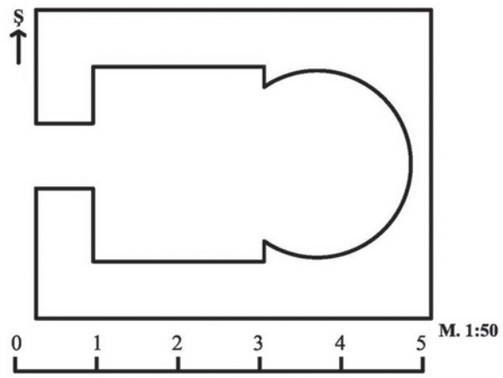

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Fig. 25. Illustrations: 1. Pashan Chapel. 2. Plan of the Pashan Chapel. 3. Mukhakh Chapel. 4. Plan of the Mukhakh Chapel. 5. Albanian church of Chotari. 6. Albanian church of Chotari outside

Roughly hewn stones were used in the construction and the interior was plastered. Based on the inscription on the wall, it is clear that the latest phase of the building dates to the 17th century (*Izvestija Azkomstarisa* 1929. No. 4, pp. 177–178).

The Alinjachay Monastery on the territory of the Julfa district is surrounded by tall and strong defensive walls and it has dormitories and farm buildings. In the courtyard of the monastery, there is a church supported by four piers measuring 22×14 m. The apse is horseshoe-shaped. Despite the ruined state, it is possible to observe seven bays, divided into two parts. From the extreme bay at the southern wall there is a stone staircase leading to the roof. In the pastophorion near the northern and southern walls, there are extant paintings of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, however some of the images are completely destroyed. At the southern wall of the church there is a chapel (14×6 m) with a two-storey apse. A bell tower rises on piers at the eastern wall. At the western wall, the narthex rests on four piers. Based on construction technology, it should be noted that the church went through a period of rapid development in the late Middle Ages (*Izvestija Azkomstarisa* 1929, no. 4, pp. 184–185).

The construction of monasteries by Caucasian Albanians, as in other Christian countries, was not limited to the boundaries of their territory. For example, they established monasteries widely, as in city of Jerusalem, which is considered capital of the Holy Land where Christianity was born. In chapter 50 of the third book of Moses Kaghankatvatsi's *The History of the Albanians*, there are listed names of monasteries (vanks) built by the Albanians in Jerusalem; these were called: Pand, Mruv, Barda, Kalankatuk, Artsakh, Amaras, Araveank. This author noted that "later, as a result of the lack of our care, all the monasteries fell into decay". (Kalankatuklu 2006, p. 185).

The Christian descendants of the Caucasian Albanians (Udis) have maintained their religious roots. Currently, there are Christian communities active in the territories of Gabala and Oghuz districts (Alishov 2011, no. 2, p. 82).

One of these monuments is the Albanian-Udi church in the village of Nidj, Gabala district. During the restoration of the Chotari Albanian Basilica in 2002, it became clear that at the end of the 19th century, during construction work, the monument underwent earlier renovations. At the eastern end, where the apse joins with the nave, there are indications that the based of the eastern piers were elevated to increase the height of the apse, thus elevating the altar above the original nave's floor which was a major restructuring.

This is not accidental, since the composition of this particular part of the church is most strongly associated with its confessional membership. As a result of comparison with other regional monuments and the analysis of this apse's floor, it was found that the earlier base of the altar was approximately 60 cm lower. After examining the reconstruction project, experts began the restoration work. After removing the upper layers of the apse platform, fragments of the previous base of the apse was revealed, as well as a semicircular protrusion of stones along the entire wall. Thus, the assumptions of the restorers were confirmed,

and the apse platform was reconfigured to reflect the original design (Mammadova et al. 2006, pp. 20–21).

The revival of the Albanian Apostolic Church, which was liquidated in 1836 by a decree of the Russian tsar began on April 10, 2003, with the registration by the State Committee for Religious Affairs of the Albanian-Udi Christian community in the village of Nidj of the Gabala district (Mobili 2007, pp. 151–152).

During the same period, with the support of the Azerbaijani state and the financing of the Norwegian humanitarian organization, the Apostolic Church of St. Elisha was restored in the village of Kish, Sheki district. Its history is now better understood, leading to the hypothesis that it is directly related to the apostolic period of Christianity in the Caucasus Region; that is why it was described by Moses Kaghankatvatsi as "the Mother of the Churches of the East" (Mobili 2007, pp. 151–152; Kalankatuklu 2006, pp. 27–28). The official opening of the Albanian-Udi church of Chotari in the village of Nidj took place on May 19, 2006, with the blessing of the Russian Orthodox Church (Mobili 2007, pp. 151–152).

Thus began the revival of the Albanian Catholicosate, destroyed in the 19th century by the decree of Emperor Nikolai I (1796–1855). All this proves once again, regardless of the various religious confessions that were present in Caucasian Albania, that all Christian churches today that survive within the territory of Azerbaijan are part of a unique and ancient cultural heritage (Alishov 2011, no. 2, p. 82) (Fig. 25.5-6).

Ancient Christianity Sites of Tajikistan

G. R. Karimova (Tajikistan)

Christianity in Central Asia is one of the unresolved issues of the cultural life of the East. A number of serious research works of Soviet and foreign scientists devoted to this topic, however, even they cannot fully explain individual historical facts and archaeological artifacts. Numerous publications are devoted to this direction, among which, first of all, the works of V. V. Bartold, [Bartold, 1964–1966] N. V. Pigulevskaya [Pigulevskaya, 1966, 1068, 1979; Pigulevskaya and Paikova, 1963], E. I. Kychanov [Kychanov, 1978] and other scientists.

The works of V. V. Bartold, although they are half a century old, have not lost their significance in relation to the factual material contained in it [Bartold, 1894, p. 1–32 This work has been republished with additions in German: Bartold, 1901]. In particular, the position of Christianity is presented quite clearly. For the spread of Christianity in the countries of the East, including in Central Asia, two circumstances are decisive: the direction of trade routes and the persecution that certain religious opinions were subjected to in Christian countries (for example, in Byzantium).

For the territory of Tajikistan, special studies of Christian sites were not carried out; rather, the study was associated with random finds or discoveries. Accordingly, the research literature is not so extensive. Among the earlier publications, it is necessary to highlight the articles by T. M. Atakhanov and S. G. Khmelnitsky [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 187–204] about the Aivadzh cave complex. T. V. Belyaeva about a Christian name written on a bowl [Belyaeva, 1994, p. 79–81]. In the archive of the department of archaeology of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography named after A Donish of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, we found an article with the place of publication unspecified, which talks of the experience of the first generalizing studies on the problems of Christianity studies in Central Asia and Tajikistan, including, written by Yu. Maltsev the "Teachings of Christ in Central Asia". The article by A. K. Mirbabaeva [2004, p. 155–164] "New materials on the history of Christianity in Central Asia (culturological aspect)". Both the works result in the study of written and literary sources and an attempt

to recreate the history of Christianity in Central Asia. Both authors just casually mentioned several well-known sites and finds of Christian culture in Tajikistan. Unlike this edition of the article by V. I. Raspopova [2014, p. 154–160], G. R. Karimova [2017, pp. 121–139] dwelled in detail upon the description and presentation of the archaeological material related to the Christian culture and religion. In the new edition of the "History of the Tajik people" before Christianity, written by N. N. Negmatov (main part) in conjunction with Yu. S. Maltsev and A. Komilov, a small paragraph is given, examining the history, composition and territorial coverage of the influence of Christianity in Central Asia [ITN, 1999, pp. 289–292]. According to the works cited above, with the involvement of material from adjacent regions, the history of Christianity can be presented as follows.

The appearance of merchant trading posts in various places was accompanied by establishment of communities, whose influence was not limited to one trade only, but also extended as far as culture and religion.

Today, the various sources have confirmed that in the international exchange a number of cities of Central Asia at the time preceding the Arab conquest undoubtedly played an important role, and the very emergence of Christian communities in these cities enhanced this process. However, historically, the second factor played a great role here. The fierce persecution in Byzantium of certain Christian communities declared heretical by the dominant church, resulted in the emigration, primarily to Iran, of large masses of Nestorians and other Christians, who settled as compact communities. For Central Asia, those communities of Christians who settled in the areas directly bordering on it were about to acquire special significance. These are, first of all, such cities as Herat and Merv. The significance of the Christian community in Merv is evidenced by the fact that already in the first third of the 4th century there was a Christian (Nestorian) bishop here. Direct news about the activities of the community in Merv is also available for a later period, in particular for the end of the Sasanian period, when it occupied a prominent place here.

By the early 6th century, the Christian-Nestorian community, headed by a bishop, was also in Samarkand. Its significance increased in the next century, and in the early 8th century a metropolitan was appointed here instead of a bishop. The above facts go down from some Syriac sources. Testimonies of many Muslim authors in relation to Samarkand and Sogd are generally interesting. Thus, a Nadim (X century), in a message relating to the first centuries of the Hijrae, writes that the inhabitants of Sogd were dualists and Christians. Narshakhi reports on the restructuring of a Christian church in Bukhara into a Muslim mosque. Of particular interest are the reports of geographer Ibn-Khaukal (X century) about the area south of Samarkand – Shavdar, where, according to this author, there were "settlements, monasteries and places of meetings of assembly." The same author reports on the settlement of Christians in the region of Tashkent.

The missionary activity of Christians in Central Asia is evidenced by the well-known facts that representatives of the Turkic nomadic tribes belonged to Christianity, such as

the tribes of Guz, Toguz-Oguz, and later some Mongolian tribes. At the same time, the following should be noted: for the time preceding the Arab conquest, we have no data that Christianity as a religion acquired in Central Asia, in settled areas, at least, a dominant position or a predominant influence and significance. As later, during the entry of Central Asia into the caliphate, the influence of the Christian communities went to a greater extent, as V. V. Bartold emphasizes, along the lines of the cultural influence, since the traditions of Hellenistic learning intensively developed in the Christian environment, especially in its practical interpretation, e.g. in medicine.

The questions of the chronological appurtenance of objects of the Christian worship, despite the large amounts of literature devoted to iconography, cannot be classified as elaborated in terms of historical attribution. The attribution of Christian cult objects found in Central Asia is decided by researchers mainly on the basis of personal experience and intuition. And one can only welcome any efforts to systematize and classify, create typological series, which cannot be developed on the basis of the materials of Tajikistan due to the small number of such finds. It is gratifying that even today a number of classification theories for division of images of Christian symbols in various types of art into figurative and abstract ones are offered. However, the image of the cross emphasizes the conventionality of such a division. Firstly, the symbol of the cross, which, at first glance, seems to be abstract, given its presence in cave painting, is endowed with a specific meaning in Christianity. Secondly, the images of the cross are accompanied by figurative elements: a flourishing cross, a relief of the crucified Christ, etc. Despite the apparent simplicity of the symbol itself, its pictorial variations have a large number of features directly dependent on images, objects and artifacts that complicate the classification. And the very image of the cross is used not only in Christian symbolism. In quantitative terms, there is also a shortage of material, which does not allow creating typological developments by now. In Tajikistan, no more than two dozen archaeological finds are currently known, classified as Christian in purpose.

With the next discovery or find, interest periodically arose in studying the history of the Christian problem.

The very first consideration of the issue of the presence of Christianity in the archaeological materials of Tajikistan is the work of A. M. Belenitsky, in which, ahead of events, the possible spread of confessional influence on the population of ancient Sogd is assumed [Belenitsky, 1954, p. 60].

In this case, the conclusion of A. M. Belenitsky fully reflected the main position and has been increasingly confirmed for more than half a century. "The centuries-old existence and mutual influence on the territory of Central Asia of the three world religions: Islam, Buddhism and Christianity – contributed to the transformation of this region into a kind of center of interethnic unity, where interstate, religious, ethnocultural and linguistic traditions of many peoples and tribes are closely intertwined. This circumstance sometimes complicates the work of scientists when it is required to give an exhaustive answer about

certain discovered archaeological materials. Nevertheless, research is ongoing, new discoveries are emerging. [Belenitsky, 1954, p. 61 – 62]

After analyzing the archaeological materials of A. M. Belenitsky concluded: "Turning to the structure of the Panjakent churches – their plans and the content of the wall paintings, we, in full accordance with the conclusions we made from written sources, must come to the conclusion that they were not Christian churches. We do not find any points of contact with Christian architecture in terms of these buildings. There are no elements of Christian iconography in the murals of Panjakent either" [Belenitsky, 1954, p. 62].

However, the first evidence of the presence of Christians in the ancient Sogd of the 8th century was obtained in 1973 during excavations that were carried out precisely in Panjakent. Here, in room 16 of object XXIV, four fragments of a clay vessel were found – shards with a Syrian inscription (Fig. 1). The inscription was written in black ink on a fragment of the sidewall of the jug. There are 18 lines preserved on this ostraca.

Researcher A. V. Paykova found that 16 lines reflect the first three verses of the first psalm and fragments of six verses of the second psalm of the Peshitta text, the Syriac version of the Bible [Paykova, Marshak, 1976, p. 34]. In addition, A. V. Paykova concluded that this inscription was written under dictation, since it contains some grammatical and spelling errors. There are two more lines on the ostraca, written in a different handwriting in the opposite direction in relation to the main text. This is evlogia, one of the forms of glorifying God [Paikova, 1981, p. 78–86]. According to V. I. Raspopova, the inscription, made under dictation, serves as proof of the existence of a Christian school in ancient Sogd, where they taught the Syriac version of the Bible [Raspopova, 2014, p. 156]. The text is dated, according to the stratigraphy of the find, no later than 740 [Paikova, Marshak, 1976, p. 34, Paukova, 1979, p. 159–162].

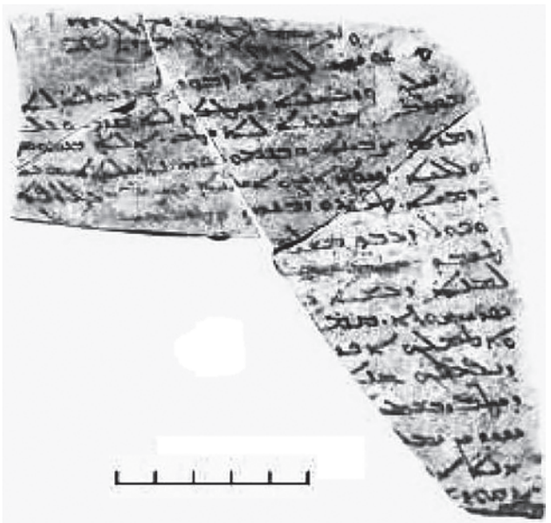

Fig. 1. Ostracon from Panjakent with a Syrian inscription [Raspopova, 2014: 155]

A fragment of a mug with a Nestorian cross scratched on it was found at the same object. In the hall of room 18, which makes up a single dwelling with the above-mentioned room 16, a fragment of a vessel with a wavy rim was found, on which, on the outside, below the rim, after firing, a cross with expanding ends was scratched (Fig. 2), [Raspopova, 2014, p. 157].

In 2018, Room 7, object VI-C at the site of ancient Panjakent, a fragment of the wall of a jug with a short ink inscription in Syriac writing was found (Fig. 3, 1). A. D. Prytula, who kindly agreed to look at the inscription, has no doubt that the letter is Syriac, transliterates the inscription as z (or ʻ – alaf) rwyr (or d) wk (or l) n, with the highest probability zrwyr (/d) wkn, but does not give Syriac interpretation. Perhaps the spelling of the Iranian name, written in Syriac script, takes place here? In this case, the stem zrwyr could correspond to the avests. zairiuuairi, Middle Persian Zarēr, Sogdian zrwr, Bakt. Ζαροοηρο [Pulatov, 2019, p. 6; Fig. 40: 11]. The second part of the word could not be interpreted.

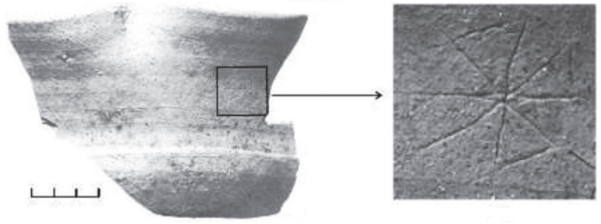

Fig. 2. Panjakent. Fragment of a vessel with the image of a cross: 1 – general view; 2 – image of the cross (enlarged) [Raspopova, 2014, p. 155]

Since rooms 1–3, 5 and rooms 7.8 are interconnected by passages and their common entrance is ramp 89 of object XVIII, and not a single passage to the southern section of object VI-C has been recorded, they can all be considered a single separate household. The presence of two inscriptions in Syriac script – on the ash heap in room 7 and on the floor of room 1 [See. Lurge 2010. P. 472–473, No. 1565] – suggests that Christians lived in this house at some point. No other signs that somehow distinguish this house from the dwellings

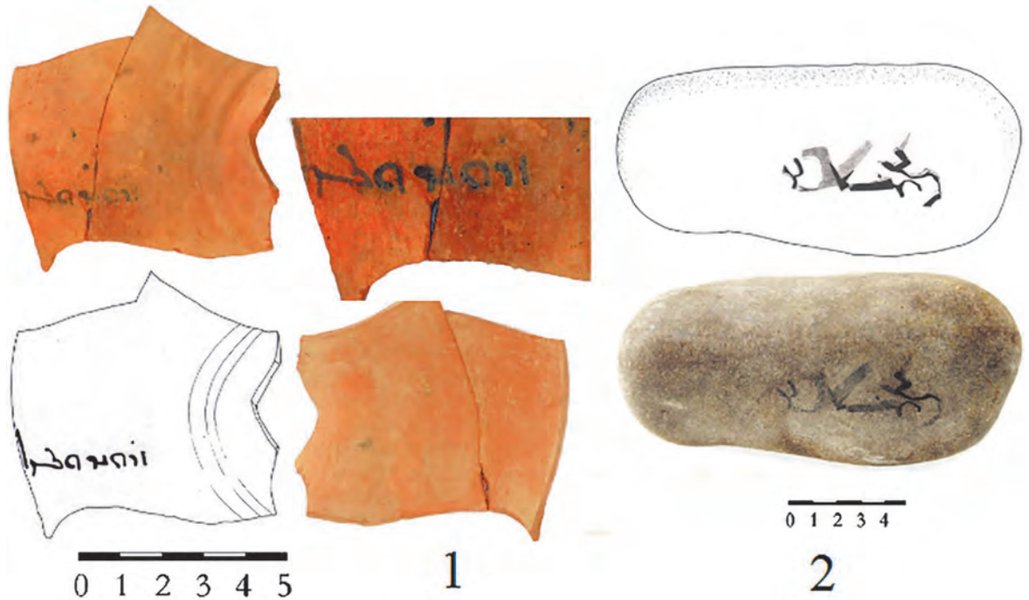

Fig. 3. Panjakent. 1 – A fragment of the wall of a jug with a short ink inscription in Syriac; 2 – a stone with traces of an ink inscription with several characters, in Syriac script from room 8 of object XXVIII [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6; Fig. 40: 11]

of ordinary Panjakent residents could be found. Moreover, a fragmented terracotta figurine was found in the filling of the premises, as is usually assumed to be an icon in the native religion of the Sogdians [IPAE XXIV in press].

In addition, in room 8 of object XXVIII, there was a stone on the floor with traces of an ink inscription with several signs, in Syriac writing (Fig. 3, *2*) [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6 Fig. 21–27]. In the same complex, in Room 1, a fragment of a bowl with a black engobe cross was found on the floor (Fig. 4, *2*). The filling also contained fragments of other bowls with an engobe cross (Fig. 5, *1, 2, 5*). XXX, Room 10 [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6 Fig. Bowls with a black engobe cross were also found at Object XI-B, Room 14, Object IV-B, Room 1 (filling), Object XXX, Room 10 [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6 Fig. 21–27, Fig. 4, *1–3*). It is noteworthy that bowls with crosses were not previously noted among the dishes in the premises of other complexes. Here, the joint arrangement and inscriptions in Syriac script and several fragments of bowls with a cross allow us to conclude that another Christian household was excavated in ancient Panjakent. It also reflects the confession of the Christian religion of the Nestorian persuasion with the practice of Syriac writing in the writing of religious texts.

In a number of studies on Christianity, there is a correspondence between the ordinary meal and the sacrifice. In its original form, sacrifice is the feeding of supernatural forces. The meal appears as an exchange with God. In gratitude for the donated food, the companions turn prayers to him [Toporkov, 1991. Pp. 198].

In cultures in which a portable table was used in everyday life or rituals, researchers consider the "table" as the sacred center of the home. A portable table, like a hearth, could serve as a place of sacrifice or a place for performing ritual actions and enjoyed special honor. In addition, in most cultures there is a respectful religious attitude towards the food itself and the place of its reception. In connection with certain places, a kind of ritual appears with the meaning of sacredness, but with the use of other paraphernalia. In this regard, we propose to refer Panjakent bowls with crosses to the category of ritual and cult objects, following the example of portable tables. Moreover, only two of them were found even in Christian households. not every bowl intended for eating was signed with a cross.

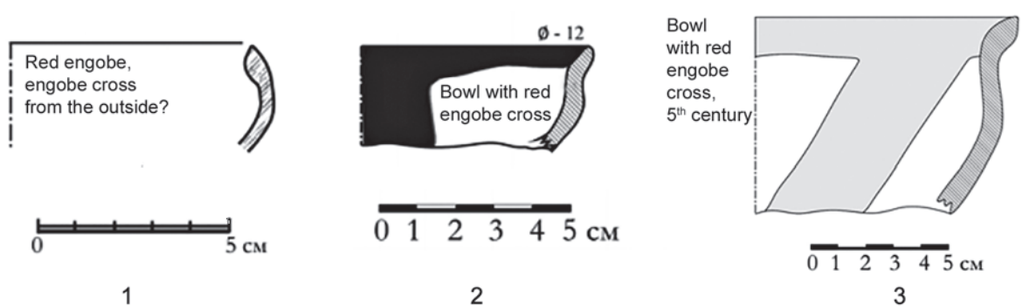

Fig. 4. Bowls with black engobe cross: 1 – Object XI-B, Room 14; 2 – Object IV-B, Room 1 (filling); 3 – Object XXX, Room 10 [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6 Fig. 21–27]

Fig. 5. Bowls with engobe cross: 1-2, 5 – Settlement Panjakent; 3–4 – settlement Sanjarshah; 6 – outskirts of Panjakent (photo by G. R. Karimova)

A special bowl was marked with a cross, the purpose of which determined the ritualism of the religious direction in this case, the Christian one.

The fact of using or following this ritual can be seen in the settlement of Sanjarshah located on the southern outskirts of the modern village of Sudzhina, 12 km east of the city of Panjakent. Several bowls with crosses, similar in shape to Panjakent bowls, were also found here both in the uplift material and in the stratigraphic layer (Fig. 5, *3–4*). In addition, there are images of crosses on the outer side of the ceramic vessels (Fig. 4, *3*) and on a fragment of a hearth stand (Fig. 6).

Of interest is a ceramic fragment with crosses in the form of a row of straight crosses enclosed in a circle, found in Room 19 of the settlement of Panjakent in a brick blockage, applied to the upper part of the wall of the lamp (Fig. 7). The image of the cross is accompanied above and below by rows of symbols, which are explained as flying birds and as a symbol of the number 3, written in one and the other direction. The same symbol was found on another piece of pottery with stamped alternating images of a monkey and a camel (Fig. 8). Such a combination can belong to Buddhist, Hindu and Manichaean signs, but it seems to us that a more legitimate explanation is the synthesis and interpenetration of the semantic meaning of symbols associated with the Silk Road routes, which have a single or universal definition. In Sanjarshah, at Object II in the filling of room No. 4, a fragment

Fig. 6. Sanjarshah. Object II. The lower floor of room 3, a fragment of a hearth stand with a cross [Kurbanov, Pulodov, Aminov, 2016, Fig. 20]

of a wide-mouthed vessel with a red engobe decorated with a stamped image of a diagonal cross enclosed in a circle was found (Fig. 9). [Kurbanov, Pulodov, Aminov, 2016, Fig. 22].

Single examples of the occurrence of the application and image of the cross on individual objects indicate the not widespread use of such images and the appearance of this type of ornament, obviously associated with the penetration of Christian representatives into the environment of the non-Christian population. It is important to note the trend associated with the study of Christian sites, which is determined by the presence of images of crosses. However, some researchers call the reproduction of equal-ended crosses with expanding ends "Manichaean" [Kyzlasov, 2006. Pp. 139–141. Fig. 2; Baypakov, Ternovaya, 2018, p. 15] and the appearance of straight crosses that disappeared from the ornament on ceramics by the early medieval time is not commented on by anyone.

And yet, among the materials on Christianity, an article is cited where it is noted that in the settlement of Sandyg-tepe I in the territory of the Guba region of Azerbaijan, several ceramic vessels with the image of a cross were found, which date back to the medieval period and belonged to one Christian community, which consisted of one family [Khalilov , 2018, p. 227 Fig. 58]. Obviously, the use of the practice of drawing a cross on the inside of ceramic bowls was known not only on the territory of Tajikistan, although researchers do not mention it in other regions.

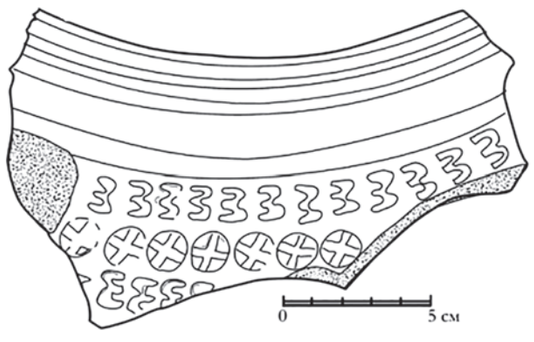

Fig. 7. Panjakent. Room 19, a fragment of a stucco lamp [Pulotov, 2019, p. 6 Fig. 21–27]

The next indisputable fact of the presence of Christians in the population of ancient Sogd was obtained in 1973 in the Dashti Urdakon area of the Panjakent region. A catacomb burial was discovered here. In the khum removed from the catacomb, there were human bones – women 35–40 years old, men 40–45 years old and a child 10–12 years old. Thus, khum was used as an ossuary, although it was apparently not originally intended for this purpose. In form and technique, it

Fig. 8. Panjakent. Fragment of a ceramic vessel with a stamped ornament (photo album of the archive of the department of archeology)

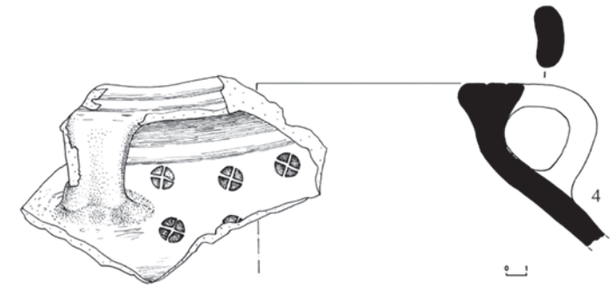

Fig. 9. Sanjarshah. Object II. Filling room number 4: wide-mouthed vessels: red engobe and stamped crosses. [Kurbanov, Pulodov, Aminov, 2016, Fig. 22]

did not differ from vessels of similar types. But even before firing, a drawing was scratched on his body by someone's hand. In addition, circles and ovals were applied inside and outside the vessel with weak black paint. A scratched drawing, according to V. I. Raspopova, depicts a scene of veneration of the cross [Raspopova, 2014, p. 157]. The cross is placed on a "ball", at the bottom of which two "legs" are shown. Cross bars are made at the ends of the cross. A kneeling female figure is depicted in front of the cross. The hands, lowered along the body, have three (?) fingers each. The drawing was made very clumsily (Fig. 10). The scene of worshiping the cross was widely practiced by the Nestorians [Zalesskaya, 1998, p. 32], and in Panjakent such worship is known from the images on the few Byzantine gold coins found at the settlement [Raspopova, 1999, p. 453–460].

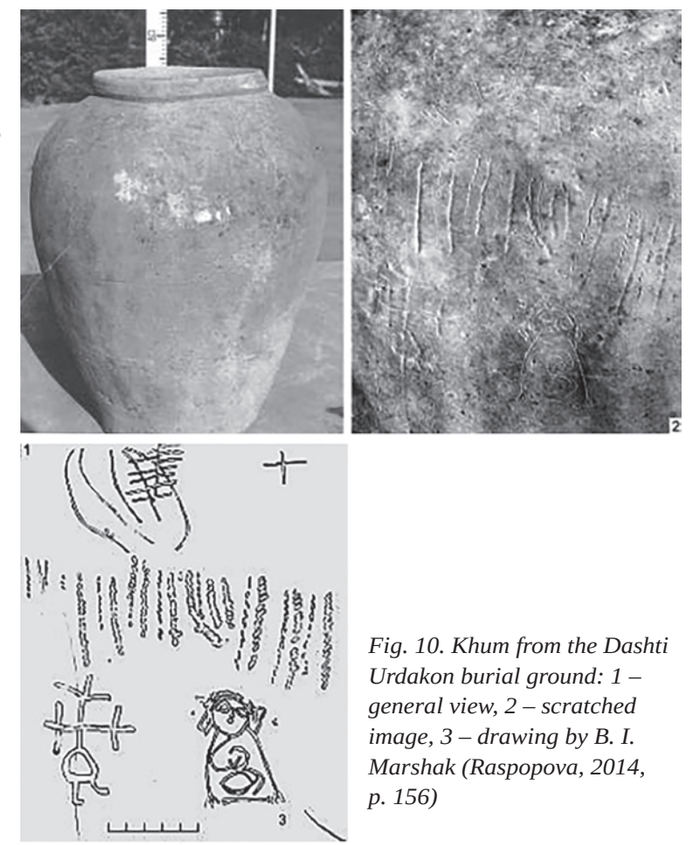

Fig. 10. Khum from the Dashti Urdakon burial ground: 1 – general view, 2 – scratched image, 3 – drawing by B. I. Marshak (Raspopova, 2014, p. 156)

This once again confirms the fact that Christians use the

ossuary burial rite, which is common in Central Asia. Central Asian Christians continued to make burials in ossuaries, decorated instead of the previous pagan images and symbols with images of crosses [Borisova, 1940; Pachos, 1960, p. 60]. Such ossuaries were found in Sogd, on Afrasiab and in Khorezm, on the necropolis of ancient Mizdakhan [Yagodin, Khodjayov, 1970, p. 146–150]. In the Karluk period (IX–X centuries), the custom of burying bones in astodans was supplanted in Taraz by burying them in khums and crypts. Such a funeral rite existed in Taraz among the local urban, including the Turkic-speaking population, as well as among the adherents of the Christian Nestorian sect [Baypakov, Ternovaya, 2018, p. 13]. It continued to exist in the cities of the Talas and Chui valleys much longer than in Maverannahr, and was no longer a special distinguishing feature of the Sogdian population [Rempel, 1957. Pp. 109–110. Fig. 42, *1, 3, 4*]. There were also burials of pre-cleaned bones in vessels or simply in crypts. Not all burials in ossuaries and vessels with Christian symbols can be safely considered Christian. Mazdeists could borrow Christian symbols – as a talisman or for magical purposes, which is also speaks for contacts between the population of Central Asia and the Christian environment. Undoubtedly, Christian burials are considered to be those made according to the Christian rite, as in the early medieval burial ground Dasht-Urdakon, in the Panjakent region [Belenitsky, Marshak, Raspopova, Isakov 1977, p. 559]. In grave 19, on the neck of a buried girl, archaeologists found a four-pointed cross with expanding ends (Fig. 11). This burial reflected the type of burial known from the materials of Ak-Beshim, where, just like in Panjakent, the buried lay on his back with his head to the west and with a pectoral cross [Raspopova, 2014, p. 158]. The cross found in the Panjakent region is similar to the Nestorian bronze cross from Samarkand [Terenozhkin, 1950, Fig. 72.2]. V. I. Raspopova who studies this issue concluded that some of the people buried in Dashti Urdakon were Nestorian Christians, and they were characterized by the rite of burial on the back with a pectoral cross [Raspopova, 2014, p. 158].

Fig. 11. Bronze cross from the grave of a girl. The burial ground of Dashti Urdakon Grave 19 (Raspopova, 2014, p. 156)

Thus, the population of the Panjakent Sogd, as the researchers noted, arbitrarily perceived the gods and religious canons of other religions, except for the local gods [Škoda, 1992, p. 319–327; Marshak, Raspopova, 1997/98, p. 297–305; Raspopova, 1999, p. 453–460]. Most likely, this also extended to the Christian religion, and in the Panjakent version it can appear in a special form, different from others.

In Central Asia, Nestorianism continued to side by side with Buddhism, fire worship, and tribal cults as one of the main religions of the region. But for the population of ancient Tajikistan, the Christian religion, in all likelihood, was not such. Archaeological materials, due to their scarcity, only testify to the presence of Christians among the population, and the location of their sites along the regional passage of the Great Silk Road

reflects only the need for ritual services by travelers and merchants. In Tajikistan, to this day, sites of medieval Christian architecture are being discovered. For example, burials of Christians in the form of crypts in the form of a cross near Ordzhonikidzeabad are known. Similar crypt burials are present not only in Tajikistan, but also in other republics of Central Asia. The image of the cross can also be found in the details of the architectural decor that adorned the frieze in the Kalai Kahkakha I palace (8th–9th centuries), and on stamped and glazed ceramics (11th–12th centuries), and on the bottoms of sphero-conical vessels (10th and 11th centuries), and on gems from lapis lazuli from Gorno-Badakhshan.

In support of the above, we will give a description of a unique site found in southern Tajikistan, which has no analogues. This is a Christian cave monastery of the 5th–8th centuries, located 17 km south of the village of Aivadzh, on the right bank of the Amudarya River, on the slope of the second floodplain terrace [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 187–204]. The caves were carved into the shale slope (Fig. 12). The monastery consists of several dozens of multi-room premises arranged in caves and intended for domestic, economic and religious purposes. The premises discovered during the excavations and uncovered premises are conditionally divided into two large groups: complex I and complex II (Fig. 13). The first one includes four large groups of eastern rooms, further to the east, obviously, there are a number of similar groups of rooms that have not yet been affected by excavations. Complex II consists of 30 groups of premises, or objects, stretching along the coast to the west of complex I (Fig. 13.*1*). The objects of complex II, located on a common level, faced the entrances to a narrow path laid along the slope. Between them in places there were sites occupied by economic devices: feeders for livestock, tanurs, etc. [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 188]. During the excavations, it was revealed that the ancient builders did not

Fig. 12. Christian cave monastery of the 5th–8th centuries in Ayvadzhe (photo archive of the Department of Archeology of the IIIiE named after A. Donish of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan)

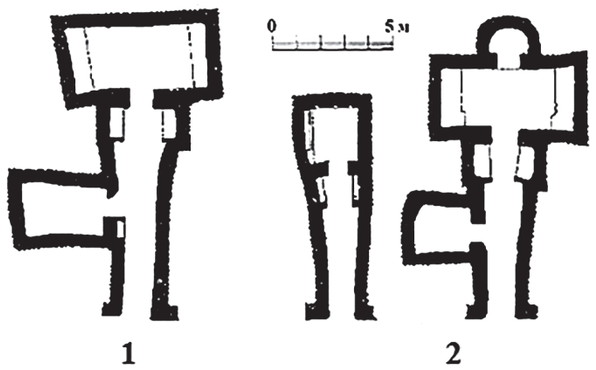

Fig. 13. Room plans: 1 – type of premises of complex I; 2 – type of premises of the complex II (Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973)

complete the work at objects No. 2, 7 and 14, stopping them at the very beginning, at the stage of cutting the entrance corridor. The layout and internal structure of the rest of the excavated objects, with a significant variety of options, are reduced to a general scheme: a straight corridor – "dromos", deepened into the slope and open from above; vaulted thread-like "vestibule", wider than the dromos, and separated from it by pylons; the main room following the vestibule and located on the same axis with it and the dromos; a side (utility) room, usually lying to the left of the corridor and connected to it by an entrance opening. Deviations from this basis in the direction of simplification are reduced to the absence of a thread-like "vestibule" (objects No. 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 16, 18) and a side room adjacent to the dromos (objects No. 5, b, 17, 19) (Fig. 13.2). In a number of rooms in the walls, not high above the floor, small niches are arranged, elliptical in front outline and curvilinear or rectangular (with smoothed corners) in plan.

There is a pattern in the arrangement of niches: usually they are located to the left of the entrance to the side room – on the opposite wall opposite it. The floors of the niches in places retained round depressions – traces of the vessels that stood in them. In object no. 15, a large vaulted niche, in front of the entrance to the side room, has traces of a double (separated by a partition) hearth. In cases where there is a filamentous vestibule between the dromos and the main room of the object, the width of the dromos in the depth (in front of the vestibule) noticeably increases. Such, for example, objects No. 15 and 19, in which this intermediate semi-open space has been preserved especially well. In object no. 18, the side room is located to the right of the corridor. object no. 15 is made with the simplest layout. Here, unlike other objects, there were no sufas, niches, or hearths. An equally simple device distinguishes object no. 17. A small room this time is located across the dromos. It also has neither wall suffixes nor any niches, but traces of three hearths and a rectangular depression are visible on the floor, and in the northeastern corner there is a rectangular pit that cut through a half-meter layer of shale to a layer of sand [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, With. 189]. The edges of the vaults begin directly from the level of the sufas. It should be noted that the vestibule sufas were not designed for seating: their height is 70 cm. Almost everywhere on their surface there are round shallow depressions from vessels, typical of household niches. Some hollows are filled with ash. Obviously, sufas played the role

of household "tables", where dishes were placed and a fire was made. Their location next to residential premises seems to be very thoughtful [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 190]. The entrance openings leading to the premises narrow slightly upward and are covered with flat arches of the arch type. They were closed with doors, which is clearly evidenced by nests from two wooden beams located in the upper and lower parts of the openings [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 191]. Despite its diminutiveness, the niche room played the main role in this complex, closing its compositional axis. In this regard, its similarity with the church apse is not accidental. Apparently, the small back room in object no. 18 played the same role. It closes the axis of the complex, consisting of a dromos, a lateral right room and a large room oriented across the axis. A sufa runs along its eastern wall, turning onto the southern wall. Opposite the sufa, in the center of the western wall, an arched niche has been carved. It did not have an economic purpose, this is evident from its large size, the absence of traces of domestic use, and, above all, from its compositional relationship with the sufa located opposite. The main feature of the back room of object no. 18 is its ceiling. In most of the rooms, the walls, carved into the layers of slate, end with a flat vault surrounded by a relief frame. The small room of object no. 18 is equipped with a high stepped cornice, which begins above a loose clay layer and consists of three steps hanging one above the other: two rectangular (lower wide, upper narrow) and upper narrow, forged at an angle. Above is a flat ceiling, in the middle part of which a low dome is carved, having the shape of an irregular circle in plan, squeezed on four sides and elongated in the transverse direction. The dimensions of the dome in the axes are 134×121 cm, the height is about 50 cm. Its surface is decorated with an elongated image of a cross with expanding blades and rounded edges. The thickness of the cross is not the same: at the bottom it is from 15.5 to 12 cm, at the top – 7–8.5 cm. (Fig. 14.) Such decoration of the ceiling is not found anywhere else. The only analogy to it was found in object no. 13: here on the western end wall of the main room, in its upper part, a layer of reddish slate is formed in the form of a convex horizontal strip hanging over the underlying wall. On this rounded "shelf" in the middle rests the same protrusion, located vertically and at the top resting against the flat vault of

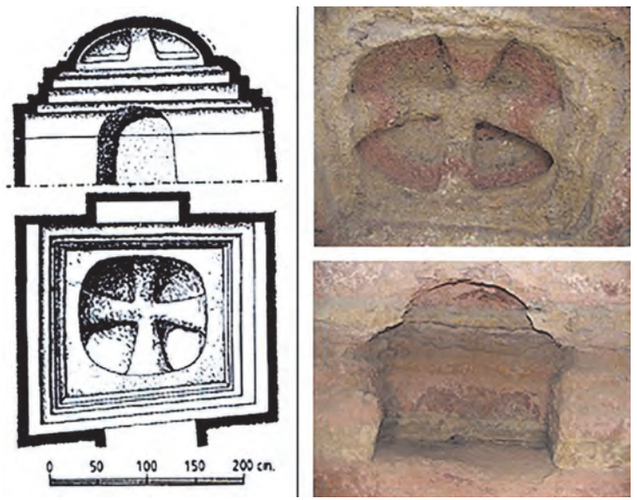

Fig. 14. A domed room with a miniature dome of object No. 18, decorated with a convex cross. (Archive of the department of archeology)

Fig. 15. View of the T-shaped structure in a room with a side niche at object No. 13 (Archive of the Department of Archeology)

the ceiling. The profile of this relief decoration, resembling an inverted letter T (Fig. 15), short and wide, is the same as the profile of the cross in object No. 18.

The sign T was not only a letter of the Greek and Latin alphabet. Written sources about the images of the cross that existed and were used at the dawn of Christianity are very contradictory.

Tertullian reports: "The Greek letter is tau, and our (Latin) T is the image of the cross" [Tertullian, 1910, p. 157]. The Apostle Barnabas in his epistle, when explaining the words of the prophet Ezekiel: So said the Lord: pass in the midst of the city (Jerusalem) and depict tau T on the faces of all those who are ill for iniquity, "says: "in the letter tau you have a cross" [Diatroptov, 1998, p. 118–128].

Among other equipment of the premises of the complex, numerous round holes in the walls, having a depth of up to 15–25 cm, deserve attention. According to their location and, apparently, their purpose, they are divided into several types. The first type includes holes made on the cheek walls of openings one opposite the other. These are undoubtedly traces of constipation and numerous fences. The second type can be assigned to holes that are present in pairs, at the same height, in the longitudinal walls of the premises. Most of them are located at the end walls of the room, at a height of 2 m from the floor, at a distance of 70–100 cm from the corners. They were carved out only if a sufa adjoined the corresponding end wall. In absence of openings, there are no sufas, and vice versa, the sufas at the ends of the elongated rooms, as it were, entail the appearance of these high-placed first recesses (objects Nos. 4, 9, 18, 10, 6, 13).

The third type includes holes, which are overwhelmingly located above the sufas at a height of 40–50 cm from their surface. Unlike others, they do not go horizontally into the walls, but are inclined downward and sideways at an angle of 30–40. Their sizes are small: the diameter varies between 7 and 15 cm, the average depth is 15 cm. Holes of this type are cut above the middle of the sufas, or above their edges.

In some cases, through holes in the sufas themselves correspond to the middle arrangement of inclined holes, forming, as it were, a short channel passing behind the vertical plane of the sufa and going outward with two holes. The location of the described holes, their shape and orientation indicate, in our opinion, that they served to fasten clay statues that stood and sat on sufas. The latter, judging by their careful isolation with horizontal lintels

and curtains, could not have a domestic purpose. There is reason to think that small niches in the premises, with an elliptical facade contour and an oval or rectangular plan, also had a ritual purpose, not a domestic one. The only niche with a beautiful elliptical contour, located opposite the entrance, along the longitudinal axis and emphatically ceremonial place, also indicates not a domestic, but a cult purpose.

The four excavated objects that currently make up complex I are similar in plan and internal structure to the objects of complex II, but differ in a significantly longer dromos (in object No. I, 3 it is about 10 m) and almost complete destruction of the ceilings. During these excavations, a small amount of archaeological material was obtained: fragments of glazed and non-irrigated vessels, certainly related to the second stage of habitation, dating back to the 11th–15th centuries [Atakhanov, Khmelnitsky, 1973, p. 198].

In room I of object II, above the floor, a copper coin was found, the issue of which, according to V. A. Davidovich, refers to (907 Hijri) 1500–1501 AD. The absence of material remains of the first period of habitation is easily explained: on the stone floors, the debris did not build up in layers, but swept out. The early, pre-Arabian, time of the creation of cave complexes is primarily indicated by the elliptical rather than lancet form of vaults and arches used here, as well as numerous niches. It is common in the architecture of Central Asia in the 5th–8th centuries. From the point of view of planning, internal arrangement and construction techniques, the site we are considering does not find analogies in Central Asian architecture after the Arab, Muslim era. On the contrary, in the architecture of the early pre-Arab Middle Ages in the Middle East, large complexes of artificial caves are well known and are everywhere associated with structures of one specific purpose – monasteries. Although the construction of cave monasteries was widely practiced in Eastern Christianity, all the cave monasteries of the Middle and Far East known to date belong to Buddhism. These are the cave monasteries of Kara-Tepe in Termez, Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Ajanta and Karli in India, Dun Huang in China and others. However, the placement of cave rooms in one line, the peculiarities of their layout and mutual arrangement (quite, as we can see, stable) do not find parallels in the famous Buddhist cave-type monasteries, but this could be explained by the specifics of local traditions and natural conditions. However, only one way of arranging rooms in the thickness of the shale massif does not give grounds for such a conclusion.

Let us turn to the main of the few surviving elements of the decorative decoration of the site – the miniature dome of object No. 18, decorated with a convex cross. The branches of the cross have a trapezoidal shape, sharply expanding from the center to the edges, and in its outline the relief is most similar to the badge of the old Russian order of St. George. Equilateral or elongated crosses with rectilinearly expanding trapezoidal branches are quite widely known in the art of the early Middle Ages as Christian religious symbols. Their distribution area is very wide: from Western Europe of the 7th–11th centuries to the Near and Middle East, and a number of researchers associate this form of the cross primarily with Eastern Christianity – Syrian and Iranian-Central Asian. In the latter case, this cult symbol,

obviously, could indicate Nestorianism, an offshoot of Eastern Christianity that penetrated into Central Asia and spread relatively widely here.

Based on the scientific conclusions of specialists, the site was recognized as a Christian Nestorian monastery. About Central Asian Christianity of the Early Middle Ages (7th–12th centuries) there is, as is known, a large amount of literary information, which in recent years has been supported by some archaeological finds. However, the appearance and structure of Christian cave monasteries in Central Asia is completely unknown. For this reason, the site in question is of extreme interest. It is noteworthy that most of the rooms in it were once decorated with sculptures that sat on sufas, which were covered with curtains. This was common in Western Christianity with the sculptural decoration of temples and is not typical of Eastern Christianity. Perhaps this nuance sheds light on the type of spread of Christianity among the Central Asian population. Unusual Aivaj caves are a historical and cultural mystery. On the territory of Afghanistan, Japanese archaeologists have studied similar (though not identical) Fil-Khany caves, not far from Khaibak, located just 75 km south of Ayvaj. Ceramics were found inside the caves, mostly from the 9th–12th centuries. According to the description of T. Higushi and S. Mizuno, the initial impression suggests that these are Buddhist buildings, but there was no stupa or Buddhist images and, therefore, as they believe, "there is no positive evidence" of the Buddhist origin of these caves. Niches that could be considered as mihrabs are oriented in different directions. After examining the caves of Fil-khana, scientists came to the conclusion that this is most likely a place of settlement of rural (or trading) people dating back to the early Muslim period, which arose as Buddhist caves, and subsequently used as housing by villagers [Higuchi, Misuno, 1967 , Pp. 39–67].

The spread of Christian teaching in Asia, however, as well as other religions of the early medieval period, took place along the ancient caravan routes [Barthold, 1964. Pp. 280–283; Vladimir, 2011. pp. 33–34; Buryakov, 1999. pp. 11–12; Idem, 1994. pp. 19–24; Buryakov, Baypakov, Tashbaeva, Yakubov, 1999; Kobzeva, 2000. pp. 15–16; Yagodin, Khodjayov, 1970. P. 152 et al.]. This process is also reflected in archaeological sites.

Studies show that in the history of Eastern Christianity in Sogd, and in the history of Sogd, Christianity played a special role. Being at the crossroads of trade and cultural routes, connecting the highly developed regions of the West and the East, the northern nomadic world and the civilized south, having a favorable geographical and demographic position, this religiously tolerant country for several centuries played an outstanding role in the development and spread of the Christian religion in Central Asia and China. [Raimkulov, 2007: 81–84].

On the territory adjacent to Sogd, Ustrushana, coins of the late 6th – early 8th centuries, minted by local rulers – afshins, were found. On the reverse side of these coins there is a sign – nishan, with an added element in the form of an equilateral Christian cross. The etymology of the names read on the coins is associated with Sanskrit and allows us

to consider their owners as Buddhists. According to Xuan Jiang (629), it is known that in Ustrushan, as well as in Chach, kings subordinate to the Turks ruled. Consequently, it is not necessary to consider representatives of the first Ustrushan dynasties as Turks. The same is evidenced by the names of the Afshins [Smirnova, 1981, p. 32–35]. It is very significant that, being probably Buddhists, the Afshins of Ustrushana deliberately introduced Christian symbols into the coin stamp, which, presumably, was a political action on the part of the rulers dependent on the Christian Turks. At the same time, its polysemantics could also be reflected in the image of the cross: on the one hand, victorious and protective, ascending in Christian symbolism to the cross of Constantine the Great [Vilinbakhov, 1985, p. 194], on the other hand, good luck and prosperity, known since ancient times in the symbolism of the European-Asian cultural circle [Myths of the peoples of the World // Encyclopedia. M., 1988, Pp. 12–13]. Whatever the meaning of the cross on the coins of the Ustrushan rulers, the coin type was definitely borrowed from Byzantium. The close ties of Ustrushana with the Western Christian world, apparently, explain the origin of the iconographic image of the "Capitol she-wolf" in the paintings of Kalai Kahkakha I (Fig. 16) [Negmatov, 1968, Pp. 23–24, tab. 3–7]. A similar plot depicting a she-wolf feeding babies is known on a gold bracteate of local work from Panjakent [Belenitsky, 1958, p. 135 Fig. 33, pl. 3–6] (Fig. 17).

Fig. 16. The image of the "Capitol she-wolf" in the paintings of Kalai Kakhkah I (Negmatov, 1968, pp. 23–24, pl. 3–7)

Braktiat (one-sided coin). Ivory. Panjikent site. 5th cc. A.D.

Fig. 17. Gold bracteate of local work from Panjakent (Exposition of the Museum of Antiquities of Tajikistan)

An almost complete glazed bowl was found in Khujand (Fig. 18) with a rim diameter of 24 cm, a bottom of 8 cm, and a height of 4 cm [Belyaeva 1984, p. 335; Belyaeva, 1994, p. 79–81], easel, on an annular pallet, with a sharp bend in the walls from the bottom. On a white engobe, dividing the mirror into three sectors, an inscription is applied in a very peculiar way in brown paint in a stylized Arabic script. Horizontally elongated letters with a bend in the middle, which go around others, also elongated, but vertically. The right and left letters are equal, and the vertical ones are longer [Antiquities of Tajikistan. Exhibition catalogue. Dushanbe, 1985., p. 3P, No. 842] The inscription was read by the orientalist N. Kukharenko as "Isa and Maryam" [Kukharenko, Maltsev, 1988, p. 19]. The bowl was made by a Khojent craftsman, which is indicated by the decoration techniques, while the inscription makes it possible to assume that there were Christian believers among the population of this area. These finds allowed researchers to conclude that there was a Christian community in Khojent in the 11th century that influenced the local population. Many archaeological sites associated with Christianity were concentrated in the Urgut district of the Samarkand region. On the site of the Christian village Vazkard. Possibly exhibited in the exposition of the local history museum named after Rudaki in the city of Panjakent, a bowl found in the vicinity of the city with a non-traditional stylistically depiction of a cross is another message to the polysemantic use of the ornament. On the inner side of the bowl, on a white background, a cross is applied with dark blue paint, circled at the inner corners by a line with rounding inward (Fig. 5.6).

Fig. 18. Glazed bowl from Khujand with the inscription "Isa and Mariyam" (Antiquities of Tajikistan, 1985, ZP, No. 842)

Before the penetration of Islam, the population of Sogd practiced pagan cults and shamanism [Karimova, 2016, p. 138–199], fire worship, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Mazdaism [Yakubov, 2017, p. 135–166],

Hinduism, Buddhism [Filimonova, 2019, p. 157–231] also, and the recognition or admission of Christianity. Scientists believe that already by the 3rd century, Christians had advanced into Sogd and Bactria [Bogomolov, Buryakov, Zhukova et al., 1994, p. 12].

Christianity in Central Asia spread during the period of persecution of Christians in Sasanian Iran, when they were forced to flee to the east. Merv became one of the centers of the Christian religion, where in 334 a bishopric already existed, and later – a metropolis. Christian communities existed in Bactria and Sogd [Bogomolov, Buryakov, Zhukova, Musakaev, Shishkina, 1994 p. 6–18]. Quite intensively, Christianity penetrated the territory of the future Maverannahr in the 6th and subsequent centuries. Thus, signs in the form of Nestorian crosses appear on the coins of Ustrushana, Sogd and Chach [Smirnova, 1963. Page 135, 1981. Page 334; Rtveladze, Tashkhodzhaev, Fedorov, 1974. pp. 145–147; Ivanitsky, 1994. P. 65. Tab. 3].

Missionaries and preachers followed them along this path, spreading their religion in the vast territory of Central Asia and China. In separate, unfavorable periods of persecution in Sasanian Iran, Nestorians in large groups – communities of up to several hundred people – moved to the East. Thus, in Central Asia, East Turkestan and China, Christian diasporas appeared – villages and quarters in cities [ITN, 1999, p. 289–292].

As an element of belonging to different cultural traditions, including Christian ones, it is proposed to consider a bronze pin with a unique image of two faces similar to Janus, which was found in the filling of room 6 in the eastern part of object V of the early medieval city of Sanjarshah located in the Panjakent region in the north Tajikistan. This room is large (4.4×2.2 m). The room was vaulted, and the vault, which was made of clay bricks, was 2.35 m high from the floor level. On the basis of ceramic material, the bronze pin is dated to the 8th century. The length of the pin is 6.2 cm, and the width at its widest part is 1.3 cm (Fig. 19). The top of the pin is of the greatest interest, as it is unique among similar items found in Sogd. It represents two identical Januso-like faces symmetrically located on both sides. Sh. F. Kurbanov and M. Shenkar believe that due to deformation, one face is slightly higher than the

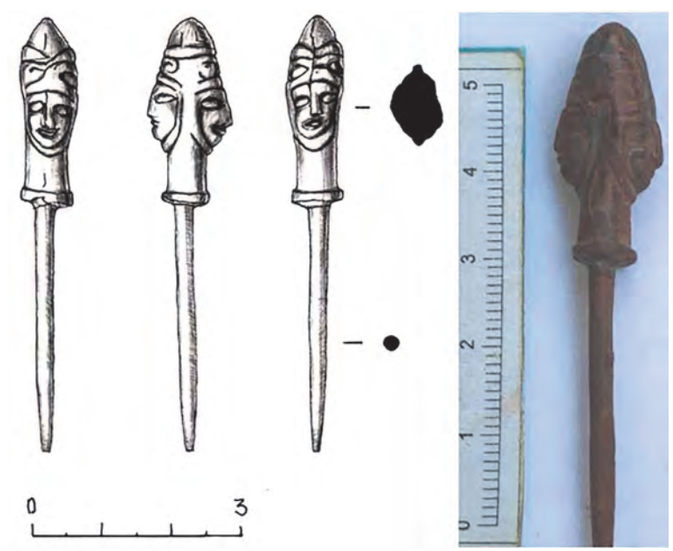

Fig. 19. Sanjarshah. Bronze pin, found in room 6, Object 5 (Fig. D. Zhulina) [Kurbanov, Shenkar, 2020, p. 31, Fig. 7, 9]

other. But it seems to us that these are persons of different ages and therefore not equivalent in performance. Facial features are typical for Sogdian art: showing large almond-shaped eyes and a nose that smoothly merges into the frontal part of the face. The asymmetry of the profiles is clearly visible on the drawing. A two-faced character has a conical (conical) headdress. The headdress appears to be decorated with a form that includes stripes and almond shapes (?), but the exact form cannot be ascertained due to poor preservation. Both faces have double stripes running under the chin, possibly a headdress strap. This type of headdress is known in Sogdian art [Yatsenko, 2006, Fig. 180.*1-5*, 181.*3*]. However, such hats (and others) never had a belt in the pictures. The only headdress shown with a strap on Sogdian paintings is a helmet. It is noteworthy that all Sogdian helmets are usually onion-shaped, but here the headdress is conical. Sh. F. Kurbanov and M. Shenkar, by analogy with Iranian traditions, believe that this is a symbolic image of a beard [Kurbanov, Shenkar, 2020, p. 22].

Sanjarshah's pin somewhat imitates real Sogdian maces, which are highlighted in two paintings of Panjakent. The first example is taken from the epic scene depicted in room 1, Object VI, where a warrior carries a large mace with a double-sided anthropomorphic image [Dyakonov 195 119, Fig. XXXV]. The second example is open in a wall painting from Room 28 in Object XXV. The painting depicts the ruler – the king, receiving gifts or offerings. His hand rests on the pommel – a mace, which is presented as a human head, shown in profile. B. I. Marshak and V. I. Raspopova described it as a "fantastic head with four faces" [Marshak, Raspopova, 1990, p. 165]. From the published drawing, only half of the mace is visible, which retained only one face. B. Overlaet expressed the opinion that "this is only one face with ornamental earrings" [Overlaet 1998: 259, No. 47]. Given the parallel from room 1, in Object VI, it's more likely that the mace was two-faced, but that's just our guess. Obviously, one should also mention the ceremonial mace / scepter (50 cm long) that was found in the temple of Jarteppa II, topped with a single bearded head with a flat headdress [Berdimuradov, Samibaev 1999: 46, Fig. 92–93]. The descriptions given reflect examples of the image of not many two-faced pommel and most likely they represent a certain sculptural and pictorial tradition that carries a symbolic load associated with religion and, in this case, with Christianity.

What is the meaning of these Janus-like images in the Sasanian and Sogdian culture, and who is depicted on the pin from Sanjarshah? Representations of two identical faces sharing the same bust and facing in opposite directions are common motifs found on Sasanian seals [Grenet 2013: 204–206]. They clearly originate from the Roman Janus, but as F. Grene [2013: 204–205], unlike the Roman Janus, who usually has different faces (one young and one old), the faces on the Sassanid seals are identical, only there is one exception for the "macehead" from a private collection and, apparently, now for the pin of Sanjarshah .

F. Grene [2013, p. 205] suggests that the Janus-like busts on the Sasanian seals may be the Zoroastrian god of time – Zurwān. The heads on the Sanjarshah pin have no attribute,

except for a conical cap, decorated with an unpreserved decoration. Sogdian aristocrats, nobles and merchants were often depicted on wall paintings in different headdresses. Deities and kings are usually depicted with elaborate crowns incorporating astral symbols such as the crescent, moon, or wings. It is noteworthy that the only image of a Sogdian deity that has a rather "simple" conical headdress is the "god of agriculture", "bobo dekhkon", the image of which is in the painting from room 28, in object XXV in Panjakent [Marshak, Raspopova 1990: 153–155; Naimark 2001: 360–389; Shenkar 2014: 170]. Based on this, the researchers propose to identify the character on the pin of Sanjarshah with this deity. However, the deity of agriculture is intended to increase productivity and interpret its image, and even in the form of a pin it reflects a different use. In addition, the two-facedness again leads to other sources that are clearly not used in religious and cult practice everywhere. And the naming and similarity of the Janus-like appearance is more likely a message to Christianity than to the local ancient agricultural deities.

Be that as it may, the pin from Sanjarshah is the only, unique in its design and the most impressive example of this kind of items found in Tajikistan.

After the Arab conquest, from the pre-Muslim religions of Central Asia, only the Christian religion was preserved, since neither in the Koran, nor in the hadiths, nor in the sermons of Muslim mentors was there an orientation directed against Christians, and its prophet Jesus Christ is always mentioned in the Koran with great respect as " Isa Alaihissalam" [Raimkulov, 2007, p. 81–84; Mambetaliev, 2013].

As the study of J. D. Rayan shows (2003), "Mongolian rulers invited Christian missionaries to preach in Central Asia, and in 1328 established a bishopric from Pope John XXII in Almalyk (Kyrgyzstan), Samarkand and Kunya-Urgench." And near the last two cities, innovative honakohs rose up. This conclusion was made in the study by V. E. Golovchenko [2009, p. 5–6]. One of them is the religious building of the Mausoleum of Khoja Muhammad Bashoro in Mozori-Sharif (1343) located in the Panjakent region of Tajikistan. Here, in the architectural technique of construction, the "places of prayer" of the 11th century were expanded – khonakoh in the mausoleum of Muhammad Bosharo with a dome diameter of 7.6 m and in the village of Ostan near Khiva, to the mausoleum of Kazak Khan the diameter of the dome is 8.5 m. The expansion of the domes became possible due to the fact that the former adobe or stone pylons under them were replaced by a well-thought-out wall system. Four pairs of walls began to support the corners of the square under the dome and, in addition, were reinforced with a second, wider square of walls. Since the Basilica of Hagia Sophia is distinguished by such domed structures, therefore, V. E. Golovchenko, the missionaries contributed further, this time constructive, improvement of honakoh. It is noteworthy that in the domed pairs of walls of both khonakos there are stairs like ramps in the pairs of walls of Hagia Sophia: stairs lead to the zikrkhona and further to the roof. Experts disagreed about the time of the appearance of such domed squares: V. L. Voronina, K. S. Kryukov, I. I. Notkin, Borodina dated them to the early

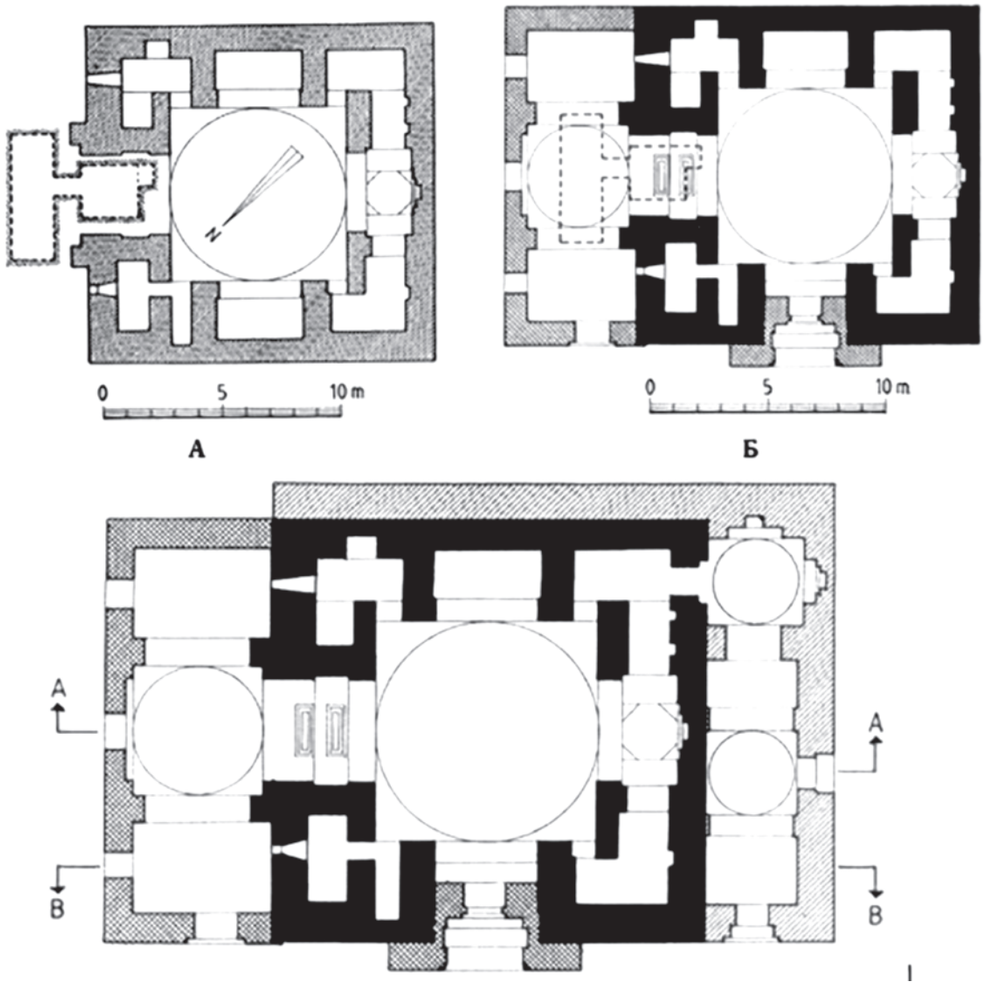

Fig. 20. The architectural plan of the mausoleum of Khoja Muhammad Bashoro in the Panjakent region Reconstruction of the plan: A – 1st construction period; B – 2nd construction period; B – 3rd construction period [Khmelnitsky, 2013, Fig. 287, 288, 289]

14th century, while S. G. Khmelnitsky – pre-Mongolian time [Borodina, 1974, p. 117–127; Voronina, Kryukov, 1978, pp. 58–68; Khmelnitsky, 2013, pp. 373–389.] New data on missionaries allow us to conclude that the domed squares of both khonakohs were built by the middle of the 14th century and at the same time reflect the methods of using Christian architects and builders in the construction of Muslim shrines.

Another indicator of the presence of the Christian religion in the materials of fine arts are petroglyphs. A particularly pronounced reflection of Christianity in the petroglyphs of Tajikistan is not known. However, individual images testify to its presence. So, not far

from the village of Shamtich, on the crest of a rocky surface called Dashti Mullo Tohiriyon, there is an image of a cross placed on a rounded base. At the ends, the cross is completed with circles (Fig. 21.*2*) [Isakov, Yakubov, Karimova, 2020, p. 357, Fig. 158]. By variety [Nurmametov, 2006, p. 125–139] such a cross refers to the symbols of the heraldic meaning of the cardinal cross. But it differs in the number of cross-sections. The classic cardinal cross has two transverse ones with circles at the ends. There is no second crossing in the Shamtich cross. And it does not have any dating or accompanying inscriptions, which makes it difficult to determine the dating. For the upper reaches of the Zarafshan valley, this is not the only unique image.

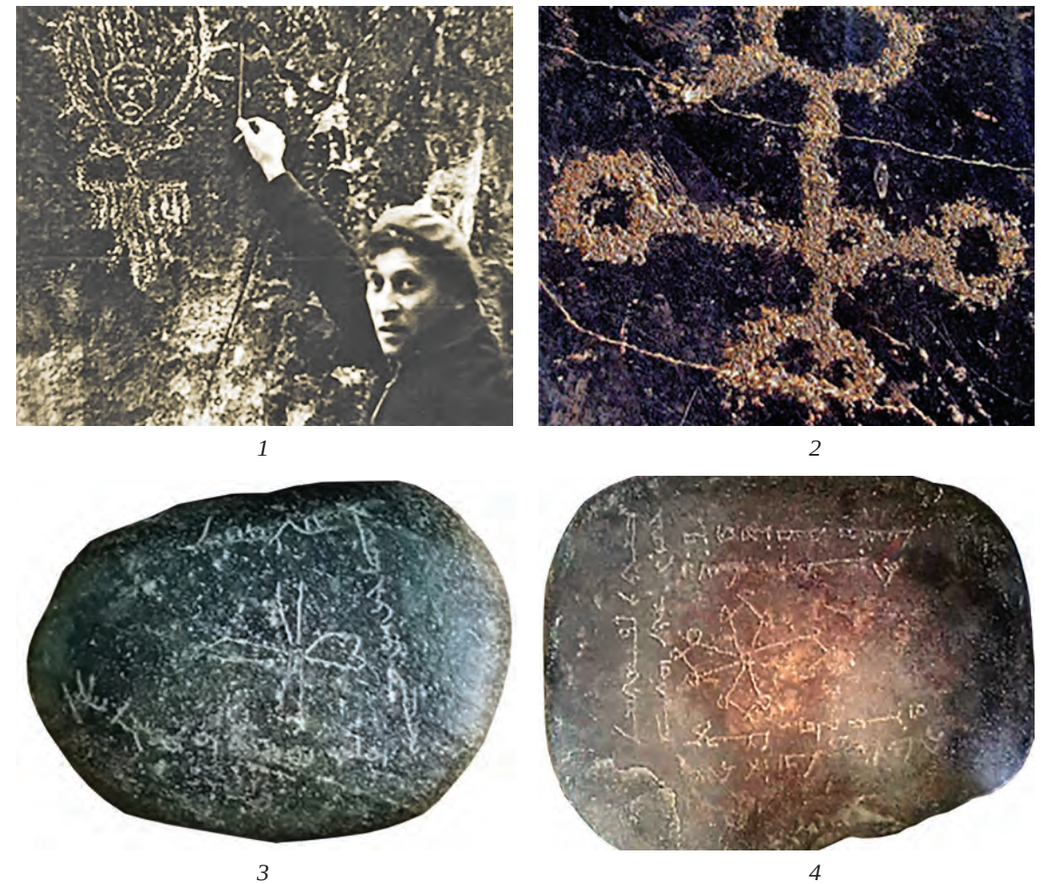

Fig. 21. Symbols of the Christian religion: 1 – Face of the Virgin (?) in the photo V. A. Ranov (archive of the department of archeology); 2 – image of a cross from Shamtich [Isakov, Yakubov, Karimova, 2020, p. 357, Fig. 158]; Nestorian cross on stone: 3 – Mountain Matcha (Photo by G. R. Karimova in the exposition of the Museum of Antiquities); 4 – Museum of the Panjakent Settlement (Photo by G. R. Karimova)

There is also a legend about the image of the Mother of God, located in the mountains of the Mountain Matcha. After a survey and repeated trips, we were unable to find a similar image. But in the archives of the department of archaeology of the A. Donish Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, a photograph of V. A. Ranov was found against the background of a drawing on a rock that vaguely resembles the icon of the Mother of God (Fig. 21, *1*), which was stored in a folder with photo materials from Gornaya Matcha. Perhaps V. A. Ranov managed to find this image, but for some reason, he was unable to describe and publish this find [Karimova, 2019, p. 125–139].

Here in the Aininsky district in 1953 A. M. Mandelstam studied the accumulation of petroglyphs between the villages of Shavadki-Bolo and Pokhut. In the accumulation of petroglyphs on stones called Dashti Guri Shaidon, lying at the foot of a mountain spur, a human figure inside a semicircle, depicted with arms wide apart in both directions, is named difficult to decipher [Mandelstam, 1956, p. 197, Fig. 2]. In our opinion, the stone depicts a cross on a pedestal enclosed in a semicircle, perhaps the shape of the pedestal was taken for the figure of an animal, and the cross for the figure of a man (Fig. 22) [Isakov, Yakubov, Karimova, 2020, p. 292–293, Fig. 84–85].

The petroglyphic image of the cross in the sense of the image as it is represented in Christianity, but placed in a circle, is shown in rock paintings in the Pamirs. Perhaps it is necessary to explain what caused such an interpretation. According to a study conducted by V. A. Ranov came across a huge number of images of the cross in the Pamirs. This is just an image of a straight cross in a circle, a cross in a square, on the palm, etc. But all of them are related to the solar symbolism of ancient history. And only one cross is different and is called the Maltese cross – this is a drawing carved on a stone in Vybistdar. Let's take a look at the statistics for comparison. The total number of drawings is 1203, fixed on 301 stones. Unlike other places with petroglyphs in the Pamirs, Vybistar has the largest number of images of various signs. The most common is the circle [Ranov, 1916, p. 344–345, Fig. 138, *11.1*]. Various ornaments, geometric figures, animal figures and many crosses are inscribed in the circle, among which one has a contour drawing of a cross with expanding ends (Fig. 32). Perhaps it was not the repetition of such a drawing that prompted him to attach it to Christian symbolism.

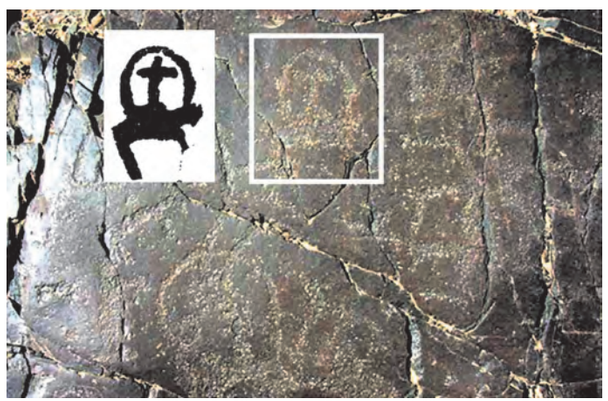

Fig. 22. Dasht-i-Guri Shaidon. Petroglyphs: drawing [Mandelstam 1956, p. 197, Fig. 2]; photo [Isakov, Yakubov, Karimova, 2020, p. 292–293, Fig. 84–85]

To the outstanding works of "religious art and religious symbols" of Central Asian Christians, ethnic Turks [Dzhumagulov, 1971, p. 159], include kayraks – tombstones with Nestorian symbols and Syrian inscriptions. Kayrak is a pebble rolled by a mountain river, in the middle of which a Nestorian cross was beaten out and accompanied by epitaph inscriptions.

Fig. 23. Vybistdar. Image of the Maltese cross [Ranov, 2016, Fig. 138, 11.1, p. 352]

Also in the Mountain Match A. M. Mukhtarov discovered and brought to the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography named after A. Donish a gravestone – a kairak with an image of a Nestorian cross in the center (Fig. 8, *3*). A stone depicting a Nestorian cross and a legend written in Syriac is also exhibited in the museum at the site of ancient Panjakent (Fig. 8, *4*). The inscriptions on these stones were not read.

It should be noted that all the sites that were included in the scope of our study are genetically related to each other. By nature, purpose, architectural features and category. All of them are grouped into four types. The first type is cave monasteries. This type includes the cave complex Ayvadzh of Southern Tajikistan. The second type is households with objects of a cult and ritual nature. These are residential complexes found in the settlements of Panjakent and Sanjarshah. The third type is epigraphic sites. These are tombstones with Nestorian crosses and Syrian inscriptions. The fourth type is petroglyphs depicting a Christian cross. And a completely undeclared trend seen on the materials of Tajikistan is crosses on ceramics and a method used in cult architecture.

Thus, the archaeological sites of Tajikistan testify to the missionary activity of the Nestorian church, and the location of the sites along the trade routes confirms the complicity of Christian services in the development of international trade. The activity of Christian missionaries was oriented mainly to the east, in two main directions: to India and the countries of Southeast Asia and to the northeast – to Central Asia, East Turkestan and China. It is no coincidence that both directions coincide with the most important international trade routes. Among the merchants participating in international trade there were many Christians – for them, the presence of fellow believers in the countries with which they traded was of great importance.

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The Early Christianity in Turkmenistan

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The early emergence of Christians on the lands of modern Turkmenistan is associated with the Parthian era. However, despite the more than a thousand year long history of Eastern Christianity, which was well reflected in a number of written sources, there are very few material traces of its presence there. But this fact testifies, first of all, to the poor archaeological knowledge of this region: most of the settlements with an ancient foundation, including such an important city for early Christianity as Merv, were excavated in fragments. A significant area of the historical core of Merv (Erk-kala and Gyaur-kala) still remains in an undisturbed state and in the future can provide a huge quantity of archaeological material.

Evidence from written sources Very early dissemination of the Christianity doctrine on the Jewish soil of Mesopotamia and East Iran is now recognized by the majority of researchers (*Baum, Winkler,* 2003, pp. 7–10), however no related Parthian or Sassanid texts proper are available to modern day science. The very problem of determining the date of the appearance of the earliest Christianity in Eastern Parthia is very complex and still remains without a satisfactory solution. (*Koshelenko,* etc, 1995, p. 65). But there are a number of documents of the Christian written tradition dating back to at least the 4th century, which tell about the missionary activities of the Apostle Thomas, presumably in Parthia and Margiana, and also contain different versions of the legend about Barshabba, the first among the famous East Syrian bishops of Merv (the second half of the 4th century). first quarter of the 5th century), who is credited with founding monasteries in Fars, Gorgan, Tus, Abarshahr, Serakhs, Merverud, Balkh, Herat and Sistan (*Sims-Williams,* 1988). Several documents are devoted to the monasteries, bishops and metropolitans of the Merv diocese, their interference in the election of the patriarch and participation in the councils of the Nestorian Church (*Koshelenko et al*., 1994, pp. 60–100).

The Christianity of Merv was known in the Middle Ages thanks to the works of Persian and Arabic authors.. First of all, it is at-Tabari (9th century), who left a description of the funeral of the last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, who was killed in 651. The organizer of this funeral, according to the Christian custom, was Elijah, Metropolitan of Merv (MITT, p. 97). Of interest are the testimonies by the contemporaries of at-Tabari – the East Syrian

Christians Ishodenach and Thomas of Marga about Merv (Pigulevskaya, 1979, p. 81), as well as the work of Abu Reihan al-Biruni (973–1048) "Monuments of Past Generations", which contains a detailed analysis of Christian holidays, the differences between Syrian and Khorasan Christians of various kinds from each other. He also talked about the Chorasmian Christians (Biruni, 1957, pp. 317–360).

In modern historiography, the actual founder of the scientific study of early Christianity in Central Asia was Vasily Bartold (1869–1930). None of the authors of subsequent generations who wrote about Central Asian Christianity could do without references to its fundamental research. In the second half of the 20th century, a period of intensive development of the archeology of Southern Turkmenistan began. This is largely due to the creation and the activity of the South-Turkmenistan Archaeological Complex Expedition (YuTAKE), headed by Mikhail Masson (1897–1986). The twenty years when he and his team worked in the austere field conditions of the Karakum desert and the foothills of the Kopetdag became the time of a whole series of brilliant scientific discoveries that enriched our understanding of the distant past of this region. It was then that material evidence of the presence of Christians in the oasis of Ancient Merv and in epy Parthian cities of Akhal was discovered. M. Masson himself as well as his disciples – the YuTAKE team – published several research articles about these rare finds, which became the scanty material evidence of written reports of medieval authors about Christianity of various kinds and persuasions in this territory. First of all, we are talking about the site, known as Kharoba-qyoshuk / Kharaba-qyoshk (Pugachenkova, 1954, 1958, pp. 126–129, 1967, pp. 86–87), which is confidently identified by most researchers as a Christian church.

Other discoveries by YuTAKE relate to objects that were originally also attributed by archaeologists to Christians, but later such their identification was questioned. Here we talk about the so-called "Oval House" on the archaeological site of Gyaur-kala – the Parthian-Sasanian part of Merv (Dresvyanskaya, 1974) and the Bayramali necropolis (Ershov, 1959; Dresvyanskaya, 1968a, 1968b, 1989). These doubts were most substantiated by another outstanding student of Mikhail Masson, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Gennady Koshelenko (1935–2015). He paid exceptional attention to the study of the Christian traces in Merv and, especially, to the identification of ancient written sources – from Syrian to Chinese – testifying to the presence of Christianity in the Sassanid state. He and his closest collaborators and co-authors – Vasif Gaibov, Andrey Bader and Annageldy Gubaev published a number of scientific articles on this topic and issued an anthology, which collected translations into Russian of extracts from a wide variety of documents – Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Sogdian writings, as well as edicts of Chinese emperors and other hard-to-reach texts concerning the spread of Christianity in Merv, its monasteries, concerning bishops and metropolitans of the Merv diocese, the history of Barshabba, etc. (Koshelenko et al., 1994).

Russian ethnographer Sergei Demidov (b. 1936) is the author of a monograph, which was the first to describe the evolution of the religious beliefs of the peoples inhabiting

the territory of modern Turkmenistan. His book provides a brief overview of all the archaeological materials on Christianity found there by that time, and also characterizes the religious systems that spread in historical Khorasan in different eras: Zoroastrianism-Mazdeism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam. For the first time he collected and analyzed a large amount of information about the local Christian communities of the early Middle Ages, and also identified certain historically determined moments associated with the spread of Christianity in the countries of the East. "Firstly, its emissaries, ahead of even direct missionaries – confessors, were most often the merchants – i. e. Christians from the countries of Western Asia, who established trade and business ties between various geographical regions, which greatly contributed to the further development and strengthening of not only economic, but also political and other ties of various countries and peoples. Secondly, with the spread of Christianity in the Middle East and Central Asia, the penetration of highly developed Byzantine and, especially, Syrian culture, the language of writing, which undoubtedly contributed to the development of local national cultures, also went on. Thirdly, among some peoples (for example, among the Yenisei Kirghiz), Christianity, as an established religious system, was used, although only for a certain period, as an official ideology, as a factor that contributed to the achievement of certain political goals, to political consolidation. Some of these moments undoubtedly had a certain place on the territory of Turkmenistan" (Demidov 1990: 55–56).

An important contribution to a further, more in-depth study of sources on Eastern Christianity was made by the Russian scientist, member of the Royal Numismatic Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Alexander Nikitin (1956–2022). One of his early works provides the key to understanding the principal, nodal moments in the history of the Church of the East and the Christian art of Central Asia (Nikitin, 1984). He believed that Merv, an important center of culture and trade, played a significant role in the spread of Christianity further to the eastern lands. According to him, one should distinguish between the legendary and authentic traditions regarding the founding of local Christian communities. Medieval Christian chroniclers were generally inclined to antiquation of history of some of the known prominent communities, tracing their origins back to the Apostles, if not to Jesus himself. A typical example is the story of Barshabba, the founder of the Christian community of Merv. Bishop Barshabba served in Merv in the late 4th century, during the reign of the Sasanian king Shapur II. The success of his mission is confirmed by archaeological data – under Yazdigird I, in 399–420, bronze coins with the image of a cross were even minted in Merv. Per the later tradition, Shapur II came to be associated with Shapur I (3rd century), and the history of the Christian Merv acquired all properties of a legend (Nikitin, 2015), pp. 39–40).

The most complete work on the history of Christianity in Turkmenistan was a special monograph by the historian and popularizer of science Ovez Gundogdyev (1966–2013), which went through two editions and has long become a bibliographic rarity (Gundogdyev, 1993; 1998, pp. 287–334). A voluminous narrative was also published by an Orthodox monk,

Archbishop of Ashgabat and Central Asia Vladimir (secular name of Vasily Zakharovich Ikim, b. 1940), nowadays Metropolitan of Omsk and Metropolitan Taurian. His book is a popular historical essay from the rise of apostolic preaching to the present day (Vladimor, 2000).

Parthian-Sasanian period. In the context of the story of birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2) tells of the worship of the newborn by "magicians from the East" who brought their gifts. The term *Magus* or magician was used in ancient sources mainly to refer to Zoroastrian priests and astrologers. Almost all researchers of the history of the Church of the East also note that the Parthians are mentioned first among the peoples who were present in Jerusalem at the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts of the Apostles 2.1–11).

The German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948) paid much attention to the issue of the veneration of magicians, and associated them with the Parthian world. According to Hertzfeld, one candidate for the origin of the name of Caspar appears in the Acts of Thomas as Gondophares (ca. 20–50 CE), who declared independence from the western Arsacids and became the first Indo-Parthian king. He was allegedly visited by Thomas the Apostle. According to Herzfeld, his name is immortalized in the name of the Afghan city of Kandahar (from Gundofarron, located in ancient Arachosia) (Herzfeld, 1935, pp. 63–66). The assumptions put forward by Herzfeld may be partly wrong, but he makes an important point – the story of the three magicians echoes some of the historical events and relations between the Parthian world and Palestine, which was part of the Roman Near East (Olbrycht, 2022, pp. 37–38).

After 64 CE, when mass repressions in the Roman Empire fell upon the early Christians, their movement to the East also began. A number of sources in one way or another testify that new religious ideas began to penetrate the territory of the Parthian kingdom soon after the death of Jesus. Mesopotamia served as a relay area propagating the new faith from Palestine, although it was not the only country to where Christianity began penetrating so early. Other, more eastern regions of the Parthian state in the 1st century could also become objects of the Christian mission. But in studies on the problems of history of Eastern Christianity, for a long time, there prevailed a hypercritical approach to sources relating to Mesopotamia and, moreover, even more remote eastern regions. This trend was to show that in the first centuries Christianity was poorly spread in the East, and its true expansion began only from the middle of the 3rd century, when, after the victorious campaigns in Syria, the army of the Sasanian king Shapur I, a huge number of "displaced persons" appeared on the territory of this state, and settled in various, mainly western regions of the Sasanian Empire. Since among these deported inhabitants of Syria a significant percentage were Christians, for many researchers it was natural to conclude that it was only with them that Christianity came to the East. It is true that already in the early 20th century protests were heard from a number of scientists against such views. In particular, Lutheran theologian and church historian Carl Gustav von Harnack considered them too radical to be true (Koshelenko et al., 1994, pp. 60–62).

In recent decades, the situation has begun to change and the hypercritical approach has been replaced by a more balanced attitude to the data of the Eastern Christian tradition (Koshelenko et al., 1994, p. 61). Speaking about the spread of Christianity in the East, one should make a distinction between the appearance of the first Christians – missionaries or settlers – in one area or another, and the emergence of local Christian communities, the formation of a local church structure. The appearance of one or two preachers or the resettlement of several Christian families in this area (and similar cases certainly took place in the first or second centuries) cannot yet be equated with its Christianization, that is, with the formation of a local church community. Besides, if we turn to the sources, there is actually no reliable information about the penetration of Christianity into the eastern regions of Iran and further in the first or second centuries (Nikitin, 2015, pp. 165–166).

The story of Pseudo-Hippolytus (4th century) about the missionary activity of the apostles, including Thomas, who brought Christianity to "Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians and Margians" (Koshelenko et al., 1994, p. 62), can hardly be considered reliable. Obviously, all later versions of this story go back to him: Thomas preaches Christianity according to one version – in Parthia, according to another – in India (Nikitin, 2015, pp. 165–166). However, Pseudo-Hippolytus named Margiana among the countries in which the missionary activity of Thomas took place. Therefore, apparently, there is reason to believe that the first of these traditions was the original, and India replaced Parthia in the tradition much later. Moreover, the reason for this late confusion is quite obvious: the first Christian community in India was founded in 345 by another Thomas, known as Thomas of Cana, a merchant from Edessa (modern Turkish city of Şanlıurfa). Over time, he became identified with his namesake apostle. But in the work of Pseudo-Hippolytus, two plots are important. Firstly, he does not speak impersonally about Parthia, but gives specific indications of exactly in which areas of Parthia the activity of the apostle proceeded, and one of these areas is Margiana. Secondly, it indicates that the first penetration of the Christian doctrine took place very early – in the middle or second half of the first century (Koshelenko et al., 1994, p. 63).

The journey of Thomas the Apostle to the lands of the Indo-Parthians at that time was not an isolated undertaking. Approximately 42–43 CE, Roman philosopher Apollonius of Tyana undertook a similar journey (see Flavius Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.19–3.58). Apollonius first visited the court of the Parthian king Vardanus (p. 40–46 CE) and then traveled east to meet up with King Phraates at Taxila (modern Pakistan). Some of the details in Philostratus' account of Indian adventures are romantic embellishments, but the whole story did include some genuine details. It is assumed that Apollonius visited, among other things, Merv (Olbrycht, 2013, p. 173).

In the 2nd century, the flow of Christian missionaries to the East intensified. Probably, preaching among the nomads achieved some success. A certain document in Syriac dating back to 196 CE testifies to the adoption of Christianity by the peoples of the Oxus/Amu

Darya River territories (Gundogdyev, 1998, p. 295), but this reference is given without indicating the source and requires study.

Although the early history of Christianity in the Parthian kingdom is little known, there can be no doubt that its spread did not meet with opposition from the authorities, as had been the case in the Roman Empire. Repeated persecution of Christians, thousands of martyrs for their faith – there was nothing like this in Parthia, unlike in Rome, because it was distinguished by religious tolerance. In any case, by the time Parthia perished and the Sassanid dynasty came to power, there were already more than 30 episcopal sees in the post-Parthian territory (Koshelenko, Gaibov, 2001, p. 97).

It is with the Sassanid era that the most reliable and well-documented information about Christianity in the territory between the Caspian Sea and the Amudarya is associated. The founder of the new dynasty Ardashir I was a priest of the goddess Anahita and a zealous Zoroastrian. The Sassanids adhered to the theocratic model of government, and gradually, with the help of the Zoroastrian clergy, a rigid formula began to be developed: "The altar is the support of the throne, the throne is the support of the altar." The natural result is pressure on Christians. It especially intensified after Emperor Constantine in 313 CE made Christianity the state religion in the Roman Empire. The Sassanid authorities saw the direct agents of their enemies within the state in the adherents of Christianity. Roman ,and later Byzantine emperors added fuel to the fire, using the issue of the position of Christians as a pretext for intervening in the Iranian internal affairs. As a result of this, persecution intensified, repeated attacks on the church were undertaken. Particularly severe punishment was provided for those through whose fault a magician – a minister of the Zoroastrian cult – was converted to a new faith.

However, the researchers believe, it is wrong to consider the position of Christians in the Sasanian state only in a negative perspective. Several circumstances soothed the situation. First of all, the main part of the Christian population lived in the border provinces, and the continuous wars between the two states made any conflicts dangerous. In addition, they were mainly artisans and merchants, that is, people who provided significant income to the royal treasury. A significant percentage were former residents of Syrian cities, resettled in various regions of the Sasanian state in the middle of the third century after the victorious campaigns of Shapur II. This forced migration was carried out in order to increase the level of craft and art in the indigenous lands of the Sassanids. The government created special conditions for such migrants, although among them there were many representatives of the clergy, including the Bishop of Antioch (Koshelenko, Gaibov, 2001, pp. 97–98).

In Sasanian Iran and neighboring regions of Southern Turkmenistan, which depended on it, Christianity, like Buddhism, was loyal to the Persian authorities. Yes, and by their nature, Christian doctrines were, as a rule, non-aggressive, softer by their nature than, for example, unorthodox trends and kinds in the most dominant religion, Zoroastrianism-Mazdeism, which posed a threat to the authorities. "The spread of heresy," V. V. Bartold wrote, "as

everywhere else, was persecuted much more strictly than propaganda of other faiths. Buddhists, Christians and Marzionites took refuge in Khorasan; the Deisanites, Manicheans and Mazdakites were to move out of the Sassanid Empire" (Barthold, 1964, p. 271).

Al-Biruni writes that Christians arrived in Merv two hundred years after Christ, that is, in the third century (Biruni, 1957, p. 330), but his information is clearly borrowed from the writings of Eastern Christian authors of the seventh-eighth centuries, who no longer noticed the difference between the legendary and real history of the church of Northern Khorasan.

Archaeological excavations in both Iran and Turkmenistan have not yet found traces of such an early presence of Christians here. In Iran, the "catacombs" and the church on the island of Kharg in the Persian Gulf are considered to be the oldest sites – which possibly pertain to the third century (*Ghirshman,* 1965). All other known sites are dated to not earlier than the 6th century (Nikitin, 2015, p. 166). In Turkmenistan, the only ancient site, undoubtedly Christian, is identified as a Nestorian basilica (the aforementioned Kharaba-qyoshk in the Merv oasis).

Merv occupies a very special place in the spread of Christianity further East. Even in the Parthian period, it became the largest settlement in Central Asia and was one of the giant cities on the scale of the ancient era (Fig. 1). It occupied an area of 340 hectares, significantly surpassing such coeval settlements of the region as Afrasiab (200 hectares), Eylatan (200 hectares), Erkurgan (150 hectares), Aykhanum (150 hectares), Baktra (120 hectares). Gyaur-kala – the Parthian-Sassanian settlement of Merv – is only slightly smaller than the Chaldean Babylon (410 hectares – within the Imgur-Enlil wall), but larger than Hatra (323 hectares). (Muradov, 2019). However, the archaeological knowledge of Merv is still too small, despite the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century, excavations were carried out here, first by the efforts of YuTAKE (1950–1979) under the leadership of Mikhail Masson, and then for nine seasons as part of the International Merv Project (IMP, 1991–2000) led by Georgina Herrmann, Professor at UCL.

In the fifth century, when the doctrine of Archbishop Nestorius of Constantinople (Nestorianism) arose and, as a reaction to it, Monophysitism, persecution of both began in Byzantium. Thus, three Christian parties clashed in Merv at once: the Melkites (who came there before everyone else), the Nestorian refugees and the Monophysites. At first, the Melkites and Monophysites united against the Nestorians. However, by the order of the Persian authorities (Sassanids), they were forced to accept the Nestorian doctrine or leave their habitats. Thus, the Melkite community of Merv left for Khorezm, and the Nestorians occupied a dominant position in Merv, where a bishopric was formed, and already in 420 CE, a metropolia. In the early Islamic period, Merv remained a metropolia for a long time, and from there preachers penetrated further East.

It should be borne in mind that under Nestorianism, Christian movements that are completely different in doctrine are often combined, which is very similar to the generalization of the diverse Gnostic ideas and systems that arose in the late 1st century CE

Fig. 1. Erk-kala settlement is the earliest part of ancient Merv. Aerial photo: Gai Joraev, 2019

among Jewish and early Christian sects. It is even more difficult to single out such a syncretic teaching as Manichaeism, compiled in Persia in the III century from Babylonian-Chaldean, Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian Gnostic ideas.

The Apostolic Church of the East first appears in ecclesiastical and dogmatic history only in disputes in the 5th century. in the Roman Empire about orthodox Christology. In almost all reference books you can find information about this branch of Christianity called the "Nestorian Church" Heresy is thus attributed to the East Syrian Church, that heresy which the Church itself has rejected as untrue since at least the sixth century BC. In 1298, the prominent East Syriac theologian and canonist Abdisho bar Brika († 1318) wrote in his Book of the Pearl (Margaret) that the East Syrian Christians "never changed their faith and kept it as they received it from apostles, and they were called Nestorians unfairly, especially since Nestorius was not their patriarch, and they did not understand his language" (*Baum, Winkler,* 2003, pp. 7).

Christianity was also widespread among the ancient Turks. It is known that in 644 Elijah, the Metropolitan of Merv, converted a large number of them to Christianity – the Turkic kagan (king) with all his army "beyond the Oxus River", that is, in Tokharistan (Litvinsky 1996, p. 424). But the material traces of these data are virtually absent. Sergei Tolstov, examining the "carol" rite of Khorezmian Christians, concluded that the New Year's holiday

kalandas "came to Khorezm from that area of the Christian world with which its specific features are associated, from those peoples whose historical heirs are the Slavs, Romanians, Ossetians, Georgians, Abkhazians. Orthodoxy itself undoubtedly penetrated into Khorezm from the same area" (Tolstov, 1946, p. 89).

There is very little archaeological evidence that could confirm the testimonials of numerous written sources about the existence of Christian objects in the oasis of Ancient Merv. Accidentally found artifacts are rare, counted in units, and there are only three separate sites of this kind:

- the building of Kharaba-qyoshk, which has all the signs of an Eastern Christian basilica,
- the so-called "oval house", or "hanako-type public building", often identified with a monastery,
- some parts of the Bayramali necropolis.

All three objects were studied, first of all, by the staff of YuTAKE, but it is not easy to establish the exact age of these sites: the fact is that the dating of the archaeological complexes of Merv adopted in the publications of YuTAKE was conditional, the average error was about 150 years, while the age of many complexes was artificially older (Nikitin, 2015, p. 166). Let us review each one individually.

Kharaba-qyoshk. One of the oldest churches in Central Asia, traditionally dated to the 5th–7th centuries, is called Kharoba-qyoshuk in most publications, which is a strong distortion of this Turkmen toponym. Such a Russian transcription was spread in the publications of YuTAKE, and in English it has acquired an even more distorted form – *Haroba Kosht* (Rossi-Osmida, 2011). HIn fact, the name of this site in Turkmen is spelt as "*Haraba-köshk"*, which simply means "Ruins of Palace". Absolutely no indications of its original affiliation or function have been preserved in folk toponymy. This building is located 15 kilometers north of the modern Turkmen city of Bayramali on the territory of the Sasanian settlement Duechakyn – its center is a powerful hill with steep slopes: the remains of a citadel of the late Sasanian period (Fig. 2). 150 meters from it are the ruins of Kharaba-qyoshk. In the second half of the 20th century, a nearby canal and the intensive development of agriculture led to the fact that the area around the site became wet and saline, which was the main reason for the rapid destruction of the building (Fig 3). Today one can see only amorphous ruins and some architectural details (Fig. 4).

The building was first discovered and examined by Galina Pugachenkova (1915–2007) in the autumn of 1951, when she worked as part of YuTAKE. Excavations were not carried out then, everything was limited to measurements of structures existing on the surface (Fig. 5). The building has been dated to around the 5th or 6th century and it has been concluded that it was built as a Christian church. Three years later, a detailed article appeared, which has since become the main source of information about this object (Pugachenkova, 1954). Experts from many countries turned to it to clarify the structure and function of the structure, which is so unusual for the local context. In 1966–1967, exploratory excavations inside

Fig. 2. Settlement Duechakyn. View from Kharaba-qyoshk. Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2011

Kharaba-qyohk were carried out by the Tashkent archaeologist Galina Dresvyanskaya. who worked as part of the 18th detachment of YuTAKE. The publication of these excavations is very short, the illustrative material is extremely schematic, the orientation to the north is erroneously indicated on the plan (Dresvyanskaya, 1968a, 1968b). The excavation was not backfilled, the conservation of the walls was not carried out, and as a result, over the next few years, the remaining parts of the walls and the vault on the eastern and western sides of the building collapsed. A photograph taken in 1966 gives an idea of what these ruins looked like at the time when they were studied by the YuTAKE staff (Fig. 6–7).

In 1981, when compiling a map of the sites of the Merv oasis, an archaeological team led by G. Koshelenko made a topographic survey of Kharaba-qyoshk (Fig. 8), gave a general description of its surviving structures, and collected a small piece of ceramic material (Mikheeva, 2019, pp. 154–155).

In the 1980s, architectural historian Sergei Chmelnizkij (1925-2003) proposed his reconstruction hypothesis of the plan view of Kharaba-qyoshk. He did not take into account the data obtained by Dresvyanskaya and relied solely on Pugachenkova's plan (Chmelnizkij, 1989. Abb. 114) (Fig. 9). Subsequently, he returned to this topic in his monograph "Between the Kushans and the Arabs" and expressed a number of critical judgments regarding the work of Dresvyanskaya, as well as on the interpretation of the structure of Kharaba-qyoshk by other authors – V. L. Voronina and A. M. Vysotskiy (Chmelnizkij, 2000, pp. 241–243). All the mentioned authors considered the Christian belonging of this building to be obvious,

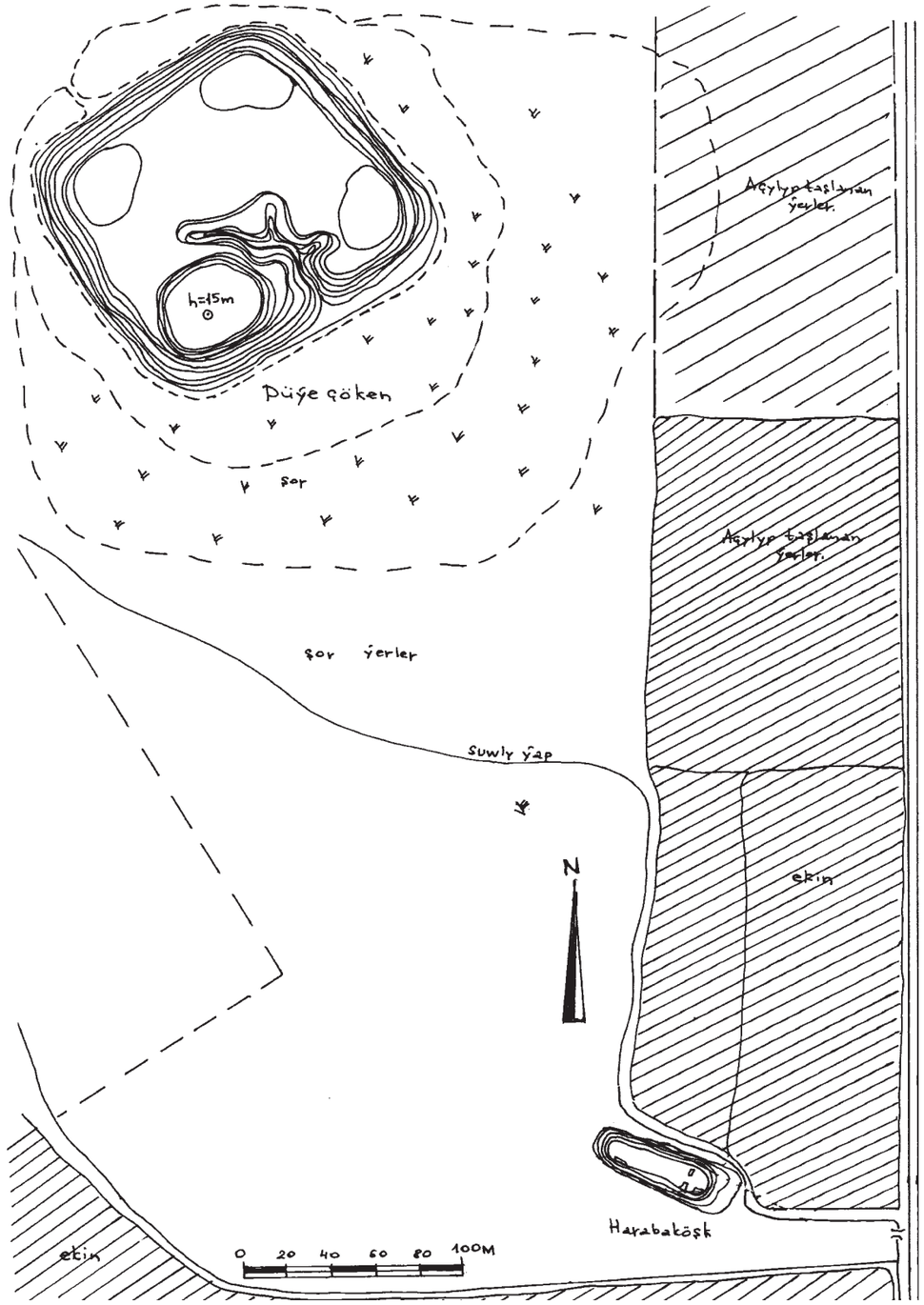

Fig. 3. Schematic plan of the settlement Duechakyn. Survey: Annamurad Orazov, 2009

Fig. 4. Kharaba-qyoshk. General view. Aerial photo: Gai Joraev, 2019

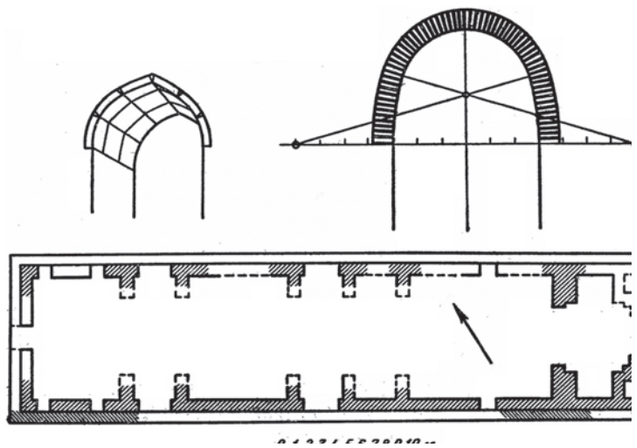

Fig. 5. Kharaba-qyoshk. Arch forms and plan views (according Pugachenkova, 1954) p. 18)

but did not agree on its three-dimensional structure.

Veronika Voronina (1910–2000), an outstanding researcher of the ancient architecture of Central Asia, was the first critic of Pugachenkova's version. "Since there are no specific indications of the presence of surviving parts of the vault," she wrote, "we have to conclude that the nave (middle) of Kharoba Qyoshuk was an open courtyard. Under this condition, identification with the 'long churches' is hardly justified. A real and very close counterpart of Kharob Koshuk is the Ak-Beshim chapel with its elongated courtyard surrounded by pakhs walls. In the first case, vaulted niches served as protection from the heat, and in the second, alleged canopies along the walls of the yard" (Voronina, 1960, p. 54). On this basis, she came to the conclusion that, unlike the long churches of Ctesiphon, a special type has developed in Central Asia, where the nave is replaced by an open courtyard. In her opinion, this feature was a characteristic local feature of church architecture.

Another architectural historian – Anatoly Vysotskiy (1944–2002) proposed, based on the excavations of 1966–1967 and his theoretical calculations, the reconstruction of the plan, not much different from Dresvyanskaya's version (Vysotskiy, 1990, Fig. 27) His article against the general background of historical and archaeological publications looks unusual and was sharply criticized by Chmelnizkij. The interpretation and dating of the site proposed by Vysotskiy did not differ from the previous ones, and the reconstruction presents a plan for a strange building, which nowhere and under no circumstances could be a Christian

church, as it contradicts its most basic universal functions: the inner space, which always dominates in the church, is reduced here to a middle aisle three meters wide (in scale, however, also incorrect, just as the orientation to the northeast is also incorrect). The spaces on the sides of the passage are divided into compartments with a chaotically changing width – for the narrowest, on the same scale, it is a little more than 1 meter, for the widest about 2.5 m. In the rear walls of these stall-like chambers there are entrances, also of different width. The altar part is also implausibly depicted – cruciform, with a square domed core: niches behind the side parts of the cross are knocked off the transverse axis, which the builders of this, and even of a later time, never did (Fig. 10). This chaotic plan, according to the critic, accompanied by no less chaotic text, does not find the slightest analogy among church buildings of any era and country – it does not inspire confidence, and speaking further about Kharaba-qyoshk, it can be neglected. The search for even remote similarities among the sacred buildings of early Christianity in the east or west is obviously hopeless. Pugachenkova's information, earlier and, of course, not exhaustive, is still preferable, since it is based on knowledge and understanding of mud-brick architecture (Chmelnizkij, 2000, p. 241).

Fig. 6. Kharaba-qyoshk. Northern elevation (facade). 1966 YuTAKE Archive

In the 1990s, Kharaba-qyoshk came to the attention of the British-Turkmen expedition of the *International Merv Project* (IMP). The analysis of published materials and field

Fig. 7. Kharaba-qyoshk. South facade. 1966 YuTAKE Archive

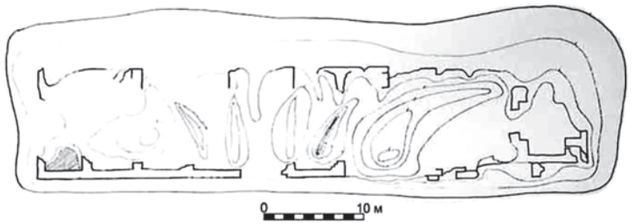

Fig. 8. Kharaba-qyoshk. Plan according to G. A. Koshelenko (Mikheeva, 2019, p. 160)

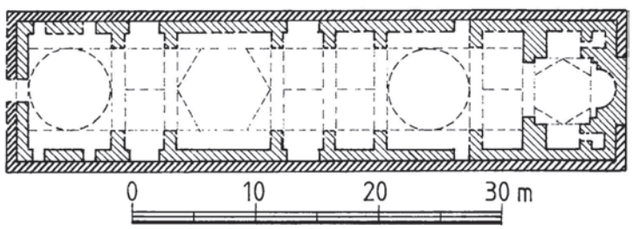

Fig. 9. Kharaba-qyoshk. Plan view reconstruction (Chmelnizkij, 1989. Abb. 114)

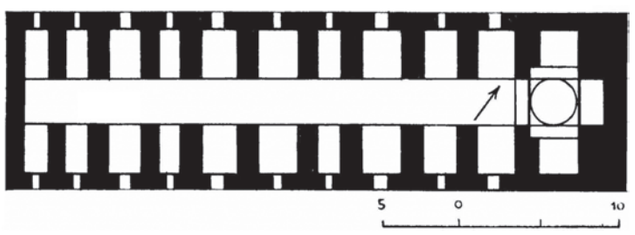

Fig. 10. Kharaba-qyoshk. Plan view reconstruction (Vysotskiy, 1990. Fig. 27)

survey of the site was carried out by Dr. Gabriele Puschnigg. She concluded that neither the plan of the building, nor the methods of its construction, nor the archaeological evidence associated with it support the interpretation of this object as a Christian church of the fifth century, and its function remains a mystery (Puschnigg, 1999, p. 104–105). Drawing an analogy with the nearby site known as Suli-qyoshk, which can be dated to the eleventh to twelfth centuries, she suggested a similar date for the construction of Kharaba-qyoshk (Puschnigg, 1999, p. 180).

In 2003, the Italian explorer Gabriele Rossi-Osmida (1943–2020) visited Kharaba-qyoshk for the first time. Intrigued by the existing Christian attribution of the site, he initiated a new stage of archaeological and conservation work at this site, which he carried out in 2009–2011. with the participation of the architect Annamurad Orazov. The article in the journal Parthica (Rossi-Osmida, 2011) is by far the most comprehensive and detailed English-language publication by Kharaba-qyoshk.[1] In it, the author analyzes all previous works and gives a detailed description of his own archaeological intervention. He came to a conclusion that this site consists of two parts, clearly different from each other: one structure – the western one – is long and narrower (block A), and the other – the eastern one – is massive and wider (block B). Its stratigraphic scheme shows that the basement of block B is on average 1.5 m deeper than the basement of block A (Fig. 11). Moreover, the analysis of the points of contact between blocks A and B, despite the fact that the bricks used seem to be the same, shows a clear difference between the two wall designs, which

[1] In the Russian-language scientific literature, it is referred to as the "Ancient Merv necropolis," "Merv necropolis," or "Bayram-Alin necropolis."

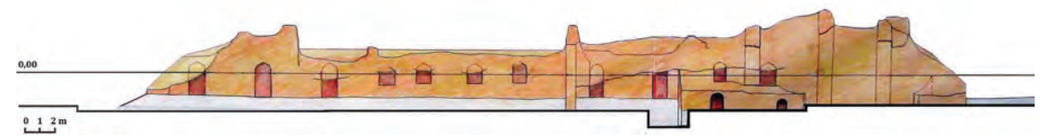

Fig. 11. Kharaba-qyoshk. South facade. Drawing: Annamurad Orazov, 2011

suggests that they were built at different times, however, both during the Sassanid period and were changed. in Islamic times.

Having opened the central part of the southeast facade 2 m below the level of the modern surface, Rossi-Osmida discovered the entrance to the lower floor of the building, which has an ogival vault, later decorated with a wider vaulted passage made of baked bricks of the Seljuk period and at some stage of functioning was filled up (Fig. 12). Unfortunately, the excavations did not affect the interior of the building – they were carried out only on the southwestern and southeastern facades, where the sluices were removed and buttresses were created to strengthen the walls. Therefore, the main features of the building are still shrouded in mystery.

Among the numerous finds of Rossi-Osmida, a pectoral cross made of bronze-copper sheet stands out, found sandwiched in the support of the arched door of the SE facade and repeating a typical Nestorian model, known in South India as the "Cross of Glory", which the Portuguese missionaries Antonio de Guvva and Duarte Barbosa called " Cross of St. Thomas". Given the context of the find, Rossi-Osmida dated it to the eleventh century (Fig. 13). A four-

Fig. 12. Kharaba-qyoshk. General view from the southeast after conservation work. Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2011

Fig. 13. Kharaba-qyoshk. Bronze cross. Mary Museum of Local History. Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2011

pointed one-sided cross, with a slight thickening of the ends, the total size is 3.0×4.5 cm, the thickness is 0.5 cm. The upper end has a transverse loop for a gaitan. The corners of each side have semicircular ledges, one of which is chipped off. On the front side there is an ornament in the form of circles with a dot in the center, punched with a stamp on the then finished product. Circles form vertical and horizontal rows, and also mark 8 corner semicircles. The reverse side is smooth. Such an expressive object from Kharaba-qyoshk undermines the opinion of skeptics and strengthens the position of those who were previously sure of the Nestorian affiliation of this site.

Summarizing all the available data on his research over the course of sixty years (1951–2011), Kharaba-qyoshk can be described as follows. This clay building, approximately 50 meters long and about 10 meters wide, consists of a single spacious hall with an altar in the end wall. Nobody managed to establish the exact dimensions and the published plans differ markedly. According to Pugachenkova – 51×13 m, along Dresvyanskaya – 41×11.4 m, and at Rossi-Osmid – 55×13 m, and he notes that the eastern end of the building due to protrusions from the southern and northern sides reaches a maximum width of 18 m.

The strongly elongated building, built of square "Merv" adobe bricks (40–41×30–41×11 cm), is oriented with its main centerline in the NW–SE direction. The preservation of the building is poor, yet it is noticeable that its walls were built in two layers: to the outer adobe case 70 cm thick from the inside, somewhat thicker (90 cm) wall segments were attached, separated by gaps and limited by transverse ledges, which divided the interior into several enfilade located part (*Pugachenkova,* 1954, p. 15) (Fig. 14). The end NW façade, judging by the results of the excavations, was deaf, while the entrances - at least three on each side – cut through the side façades in the gaps between the transverse ledges. In the end SE part, which is still noticeably higher than the rest of the building (Fig. 15), a part of a semicircular axial niche-apse with the remains of an almost square altar room in front of it, expanded with side niches, has been preserved inside. The small chamber in the south corner was probably answered by a similar chamber in the ruined east corner. The passage from the surviving chamber has not been found – if there was none, then both of them may have played the role of unloading voids, reducing the mass of raw masonry in the corner pylons; in general, this kind of symmetrical chambers (but, of course, larger in size) on the sides of the altar in the early churches of the Byzantine-Syrian-Iranian circle were used as sacristies – sacristies. In Kharaba-qyoshk, these sacristies apparently merged with the altar room, turning into side niches expanding it and, together with a rounded altar niche, forming

a cross-shaped space, traditional for the architecture of Central Asia, the triconch.

The end pylons, protruding from the inside of the longitudinal walls, were the basis for vaulted niches that stretched like a blank arcade along the sides of the central space (Fig. 16). The contour of these niches, with a span of a little over 3 m, is sublime-box, close to elliptical, and, as Pugachenkova established, is built from three geometrically found centers. The design of the vaults covering the niches is wedge-shaped, small arched

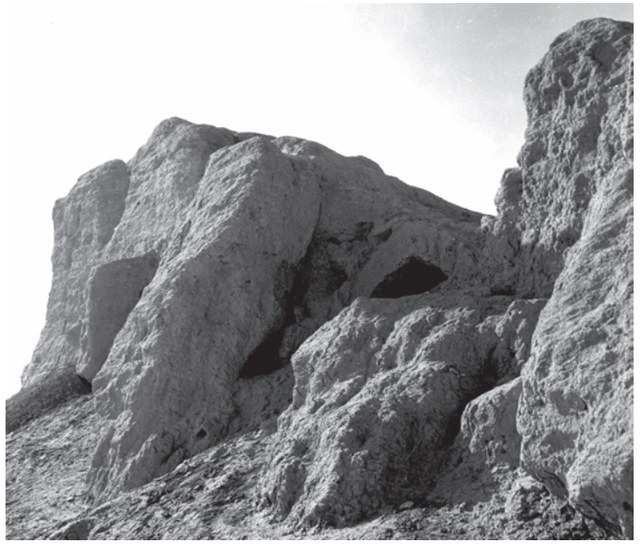

Fig. 14. Kharaba-qyoshk. Northeast section of the wall. 1966 YuTAKE Archive

Fig. 15. Kharaba-qyoshk. Vault above the entrance to the altar. View from the north. 1966 YuTAKE Archive

Fig. 16. Kharaba-qyoshk. Vaulted penetration on the southern facade. 1966 YuTAKE Archive

lintels are laid flat with bricks and differ, due to small spans (up to 1.5 m), small lancet. In both cases, the builders did not do without circles (*Pugachenkova,* 1954, p. 16).

Probably, transverse arches with a span of somewhat less than 7 m were thrown between the pylons – a design that is really feasible in raw brick. These arches divided the interior space of the building into several different-sized parts, which, however, did not violate its unity (Fig. 17). Khmelnytsky believed (his geometrical analysis confirms this) that at least two parts, square in plan – the first with the north-west and the penultimate one in front of the altar – were covered with domes; the third part from the NW and the rectangular altar space could be covered with a hexagonal "ruzan" vault, and the narrow gaps between these wide parts were covered with vaults on girth arches. The variety of forms and designs of ceilings in the spacious, deep church hall should have been very effective.

As noted above, Voronina doubted the possibility of continuous vaulted ceilings of Kharaba-qyoshk and believed that the building was open from above and, therefore, was – excluding the altar – a courtyard. According to Chmelnizkij, this is not true: the span of the floors was not 10, but about 7 m, their girth arches rested not on relatively thin walls, but on transverse pylons that worked as buttresses. In addition, all real parallels connect the Merv building with church structures of the domed-vaulted type.

Typologically, Kharoba-qyoshk, as it appears in Pugachenkova's reconstruction with Chmelnizkij's additions, can be called a modification of the churches of the so-called hall type, common in the Middle Ages in the Middle East and Transcaucasia. Probably, the "hall" churches originated from ordinary three-nave basilicas, which evolved – for various reasons – in the direction of narrowing the side aisles, which eventually completely disappeared, and the pillars separating the naves "merged" with the side walls and turned into protrusions-pylons. The primary source of "hall" churches in Transcaucasia were the so-called domed basilicas. Their center covered the dome, and the number of piers separating the naves was limited to four. This is probably why the "hall-type" temples in Armenia and Georgia are not very long, and the number of pylons protruding from their side

Fig. 17. Kharaba-qyoshk. Wall abutments in the interior (southern wall). 1966 YuTAKE Archive

walls is usually limited to two pairs. Such are the churches of Lamasi-Sakdari in Georgia (12th century) and Shirakvan in Armenia (9th – early 10th century). True, there are exceptions – for example, the Nestorian church in Turkish Armenia near the city of Kerkuk, dating back to the 5th century. Four pylons protrude from the walls of its oblong vaulted hall (14×5 m) on each side, forming a series of five arched niches covered with conchs. These niches, combined with thick paired semi-columns (the front sides of the pylons are decorated with them), give the hall of the ancient church a resemblance to the halls of the Sasanian palace of the fifth century in Sarvistan.

Pugachenkova compared the planning arrangement of Kharaba-qyoshk with "long churches" in such ancient cities as Ephesus (Turkey), Ctesiphon and Hira (Iraq). Chmelnizkij added even closer analogies – the early Christian (4th–5th centuries) temples of Southern Syria (Khauran region) in Umm idi-Jimal and Lubben. They are similar to Kharaba-qyoshk not only in the single-nave space and wall niches separated by pylons, but also in proportions, and in one case even in the number of protrusions-pylons. Thus, Kharaba-qyoshk, as a church, finds quite a lot of undoubted, close and contemporary analogues (Chmelnizkij, 2000, p. 243; Mikheeva, 2019, pp. 161–168).

Despite all these hypothetical judgments and three invasions into the structure of the building, one has to admit that it remains far from being well-studied. The fact that evidence of a Parthian settlement of the second and third centuries was found in the area around

Kharaba-qyoshk, and that the building of the fifth-seventh centuries closely resembles the synagogues of Syria and Iraq, suggests that in this case there could be a proto-Christian, *domus ecclesiae*, which Pugachenkova defined it as a "church hall", probably built on the basis of a previous Parthian building (Rossi-Osmida, 2011, pp. 174–175).

Thus, Kharaba-qyoshk has experienced several periods of functioning during its long life. Obviously, when the owners left, the former church was overhauled and continued to be used in a different capacity for a very long time. Perhaps, in connection with the change in functions, the wall ledges were lengthened, turning into transverse walls, and new doors were pierced between them in the previously blank piers – the drawing of the southern facade published by Dresvyanskaya clearly shows the differences in their height and shape (*Dresvyanskaya,* 1968b). Among the finds unearthed in 2011 during the clearing of the basement of the building was repair masonry made of square baked bricks, as well as a lot of ceramics, metal products and even coins dating back to the 11th–12th centuries, when the state of the Great Seljuks reached its peak. This just went to confirm the opinion of Pugachenkova that during this period the building was used for some practical purpose and was subjected to restructuring. She even suggested that "during this time of the triumph of the orthodox Islam, the plaster was knocked down inside, on which paintings on evangelical subjects could be placed" (*Pugachenkova,* 1967, p. 87). And only after the clay vaults of the central hall collapsed, people finally left this structure.

The "Oval House" If archaeologists have no particular doubts about Kharaba-qyoshk, even though there are skeptics, this site, in its layout and arrangement, is nevertheless similar to other East Syrian churches. The situation is quite different with the "oval house", which is also called by his researcher "a public house of the *khanako* type" (Dresvyanskaya, 1968a, p. 11). The legitimacy of using the Persian-Sogdian term *khanako* in relation to this structure was quite convincingly disputed (Demidov, 1990, pp. 48–49). Located in the northeastern part of ancient Merv (Gyaur-kala settlement), the "oval house" was excavated by the forces of YuTAKE in 1953–1964 and identified by the authors of the excavations as a Christian, or rather, a Nestorian monastery (Dresvyanskaya, 1974). This rather massive structure for its time appeared, according to archeology, in the fifth century and was abandoned, probably in the early seventh century. It was erected on the ruins of some large building of the Parthian period and was an irregularly shaped oval in plan, for which it received the conventional name of the "oval house" (Fig. 18–19). The remains of an ancient building, turned into a platform, raised the building more than 3 m above the terrain. The building is oriented with its long side in the direction of N–S, had dimensions, within the axes, of 58 and 42 m, and was enclosed in an irregularly shaped "casing" of unusually thick adobe walls: in the north, their thickness was 4.5 m, in the south it even reached 6 m. A straight adobe ramp led to the only entrance that cut through the wall in its thickest southern part.

The internal structure of the "oval house" consisted of 33 rooms, attached from the inside to the wall, for the most part oblong, narrow and vaulted (the corner rooms received

a rare triangular segmental shape). They surround a courtyard, which the builders probably wanted to make rectangular, but which – due to the general rounded and asymmetrical contour – received a trapezoidal shape. These cell-rooms are almost devoid of household equipment common for dwellings of that time: there were hearths only in some of them, rarely – only in four cells, sufas were found. The walls of many rooms were painted black. It has been established that over the course of its relatively short life, the object was rebuilt many times: old entrances were closed and new entrances were cut, two-room "apartments" on the eastern side were divided, turning into single cells, and single cells on the western side were united, on the contrary, through passages and lost direct exits into the yard. Two oblong rooms on the sides of the southern entrance lost the openings facing the courtyard, instead of which semicircular apses were made at the ends here. For some reason, most of the small niches that made up almost the only decoration of these gloomy chambers were laid: they surprise with an unexpected variety of their false-vaulted forms (Fig. 20).

The rooms of the northern group face the entrances to the corridor, separated from the courtyard by a solid wall with a single corner exit. It was probably always dark here, since the cells of the monastery had no windows and were illuminated only through doorways. Later, the southern part of the courtyard near the entrance was built up with a

Fig. 18. The "Oval House" General view in 1964 YuTAKE Archive

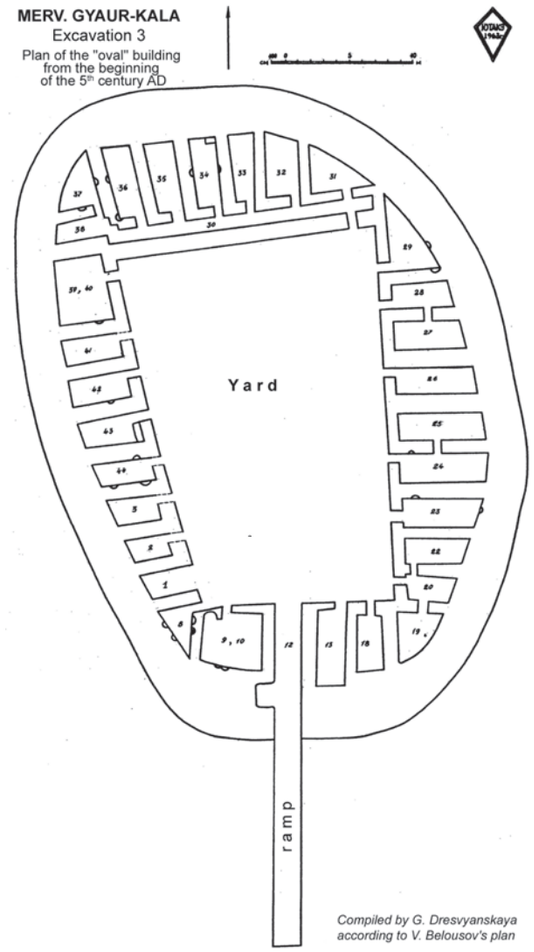

Fig. 19. "Oval House", plan. YuTAKE Archive

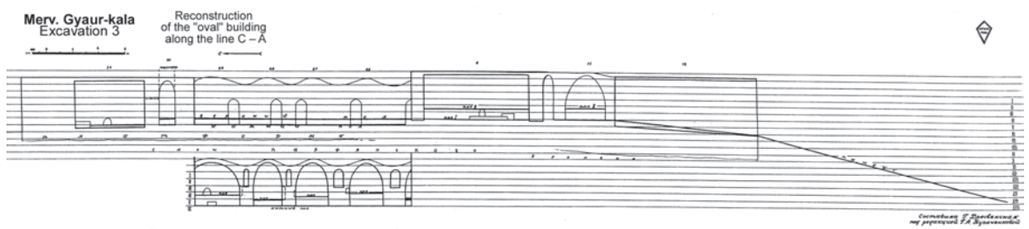

Fig. 20. The "Oval House", section. Reconstruction by Galina Dresvyanskaya, edited by Galina Pugachenkova. YuTAKE Archive

group of three parallel, relatively large rooms, which almost halved its free space – before that, the room at the NW corner of the courtyard was the most spacious, later divided into two parts.

According to the researcher, the finds of the 1954 excavations testify to the fact that this closed structure, fenced off from the outside world, was built by Christians: a cylindrical stone seal depicting a cross and cross-graffiti on the plastered wall of one of the cells (Fig. 21–22). The absence of minimal – even for those times – comfort, women's and children's utensils, the deliberately gloomy black coloring of the walls speaks of the harsh, ascetic nature of the people who lived there. It seems strange that the building consists of premises only for residential – in any case, clearly not cult – purpose: among the cells surrounding the courtyard there is not one that would be suitable for general meetings, meals and worship, even two southern rooms with apses similar to altar ones, are obviously too small for this. The "Oval House", according to Galina Dresvyanskaya, and other YuTAKE archaeologists, including Prof. Mikhail Masson, as well as such a hypercritical analyst as Sergei Chmelnizkij, was a monastic hostel and, apparently, nothing more. (*Chmelnizkij,* 2000, p. 250). Puzzling is the information passed

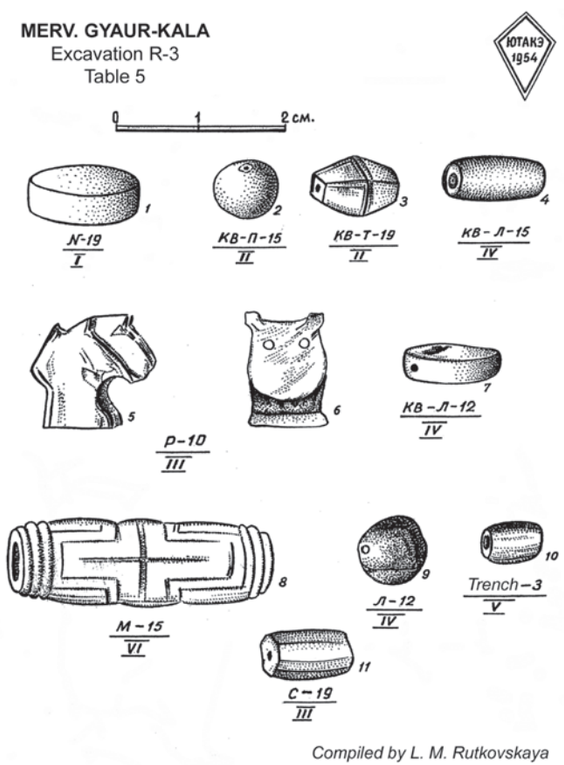

Fig. 21. The "Oval House", the finds of 1954. YuTAKE Archive

on by Dresvyabskaya that it was not the only Christian building in the NE part of Gyaur-kala: according to her, 50 m to the southwest of it, remains of a building built of adobe material of the same size (38×38×9–10 cm), of the same bluish color and with the same brands (impression of a right hand) as in the "Oval house". On this shaky basis, the building started to be referred to as a Christian temple of the 4th–6th centuries (*Dresvyanskaya,* 1974, p. 172). However, there is no more evidence of this object either in published materials or in the YuTAKE archives.

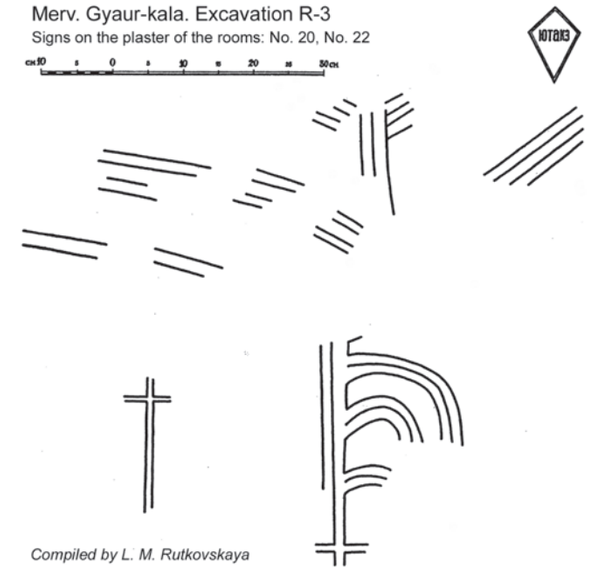

Fig. 22. The "Oval House", signs on the plaster in the premises. YuTAKE Archive

The definition of the "oval house" as a Christian monastery was challenged by archaeologists A. Bader, V. Gaibov and G. Koshelenko, Comparing this building with authentic monasteries located in the territory of Northern Mesopotamia, they suggested that the "oval house" could not be considered a monastery. The presence of small rooms located According to them, there are not enough spaces around the perimeter of the courtyard, which are considered cells, because there are no other premises necessary for the functioning of the monastery, such as the monastery church, refectory, scriptorium, etc. The "Oval House" was more like some kind of state warehouse, and not a monastery, these researchers believe. In addition, it is necessary to keep in mind the information about the Merv monasteries, which is contained in the "Book of Grace"[2]. It mentions three residents of Merv, who were the founders of monasteries. One of them founded a monastery in Palestine, the other two – in the region of Merv. At the same time, the text emphasizes that these monasteries were located in the desert (Chabot, 1896, pp. 37–38). Therefore, there are more reasons to consider cave complexes on the right bank of the Murghab in the Tashkepri district (Pugachenkova, 1958b) or a recently discovered extensive underground complex with remains of murals, located in the center of the South-Eastern Karakum, which has not yet been an object of research, to be monasteries (Bader, Gaibov, Koshelenko, 1996, pp. 93–94).

[2] A detailed analysis of the history of research and construction of the site has also been published in Russian, with the involvement of a large comparative material on the early Christian architecture of the Near and Middle East and a discussion of the issue of the ceiling of Kharaba-qyoshk and the arrangement of its eastern altar part, taking into account the works of Rossi-Osmida (Mikheeva, 2019).

We are talking about several man-made caves cut in the terraces of the steep bank of the Murgab River and its tributaries in the area of the Karabil Uplands (Fig. 23–24). The entrances to them are arranged in vertical ledges of soft sandstone in such a way that it is extremely difficult to get inside. This can be done from below, from the water level, using a ladder, or from above, descending with climbing equipment. Everything suggests that such difficulty in accessing underground premises had a single purpose – to ensure their safety, to arrange for a reliable shelter for the inhabitants here. But who, when and why came up with such an ingenious form of a dwelling? There are three main questions that have yet to be answered. The most expressive decoration of the pilasters and coffering in the opening part of a corridor of one of the caves (Fig. 25–26). The Ekedeshik cave complex, included in the register of historical sites of Turkmenistan under the name Ekegovak, was explored better than others. This is a two-tier structure, which is a straight corridor that goes 37 meters deep into the coastal terrace. On both sides of it, opposite each other, there are the rectangular rooms, from where the entrances to smaller chambers had been cut. In a number of places, closets with round pits are arranged – these are either filled wells or devices for storage of supplies. The corridor is closed by an oval niche resembling an altar (Fig. 27).

Fig. 23. Entrances to the Dortgovak cave complex on the Murghab. Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2010

Fig. 24. Cave complex Gyzyldzhar. Photo: Annamurad Orazov, 2009

Pugachenkova dated these catacombs to the 10th–11th centuries, but this conclusion was based only on finds collected from the floor surfaces, which may be the evidence of late life that continued in the caves in the subsequent centuries. This type of artificial shelter served as monasteries in Central Asia – usually for Buddhists, and sometimes Christians. A number of such sites are known in Western China (Yungang, Tienlongshan), Afghanistan (Bamiyan), Southern Uzbekistan (Kara-tepe near Termez) and Tajikistan (Aivaj) (Fig. 28). It is not easy to determine the confessional affiliation of such monasteries – even in the Middle Ages, Christian travelers sometimes mistook Buddhist sites for Christian ones (Chmelnizkij, 2000, pp. 250–254).

Fig. 25. Nameless cave complex on Murgab. Clearing the entrance. Photo: Rejepmurad Dzhepbarov, 2009

Bayramali necropolis. Another mainly excavated site associated with Christianity is a large necropolis of about 3 hectares, which functioned for several centuries in the pre-Islamic period. It is located on the northern outskirts of the modern town of Bayramali, 5 km west of the ancient settlement of Gyaur-kala, and before the excavations it consisted of seven small, but strongly swollen hills located next to each other (Fig. 29). Archaeological work on the site showed that in the southern part of the necropolis there was a group of ground burial structures, nauses, built at about the same time – in the late second – early third century CE. All buildings were built of mud brick, but had different layouts. Apart from burials, which are believed to be according to the Zoroastrian funerary rite, burials were recorded in the necropolis in soil grave pits, in grave pits lined with fired or raw bricks, and in cylindrical ceramic coffins (Fig. 30–33). Since this is contrary to Zoroastrian norms, the authors of the excavations, which were carried out here intermittently in 1954–1975, identified the entire necropolis as “predominantly Christian” (Dresvyanskaya, 1989) But the evidence base in favor of this version is extremely weak, which has been pointed out more than once in publications (Bader, Gaibov, Koshelenko, 1996, p. 94; Nikitin, 2001, 2015; Mikheeva, 2017, 2021).

Fig. 26. Nameless cave complex on Murgab. Decoration of pilasters and coffering. Photo: Rejepmurad Dzhepbarov, 2009

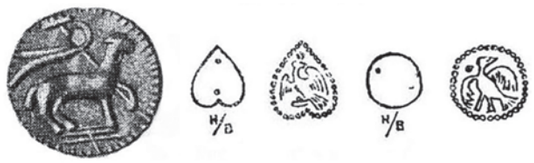

Fig. 37. Geokdepe treasure. Plaques with images of a ram and a bird (Masson, 1956, p. 46)

Fig. 38. Geokdepe treasure. Medallion depicting a ram (Masson, 1956, p. 47)

a tunic, behind it is an inclined shaft with a complex pommel (Fig. 37–38).

Ancient Christian symbolism makes it possible to explain the images found. The "tailed" ram is an image of a lamb borrowed from Judaism – which in Christianity has become a symbolic image of Christ the Messiah (Fig. 39). In the earliest Christian sites, the lamb is depicted either without attributes, or only with a vessel for milk. On the Geoktepe finds, this symbol is already much more complicated. The lines of the pedestal on which the ram stands are a symbolic image of Mount Golgotha, where, according to Christian teaching, Jesus was crucified. This is evidenced by the cross found on the medallions under the belly of the lamb, reminiscent of a similar composition on the Byzantine coins of the period of Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (578–582). Poles with various tops and bandages – banners, i.e., the cult banners of the Christian church, which were designed to symbolize its victory over paganism. The earliest written references to banners date back to the sixth century, although they apparently began to be used somewhat earlier.

The semantics of the symbol of the image of the lamb on the medallions is confirmed by the direct image on the reverse side of the figure of Christ the Shepherd, also with a banner. Such combinations of symbols have been in practice since the fifth century. At the end of the seventh century, the image of the lamb-Christ in the Orthodox Church was canceled. The Council of Trullo (691), which made this decision, proposed to depict Jesus Christ "according to human nature." However, this prescription, of course, could not then be obligatory for the numerous Central Asian communities of Christian sects. As for the bird depicted on the plaques, this is undoubtedly a prototype of Bennu, the sacred bird of Ancient Egypt, which, under the name of the legendary Phoenix distorted by the Greeks, became a symbol of resurrection and immortality in early Christianity.

Fig. 39. Geokdepe treasure. Drawing images on the medallion (Masson, 1956, p. 47)

Analyzing the finds of the Geoktepe treasure, Masson came to the conclusion that the time of their manufacture dates back "about the sixth century, when, along with the Merv metropolia,

there was a metropolia in Herat, transformed from an episcopal see in 588, and when the episcopal see was established in Samarkand, and in Abiverd (a city in the territory of Southern Turkmenistan) was inhabited by the famous Bishop Joseph of Abiverd (Masson, 1956, p. 47). Here he also expresses the idea about the presence of holes on all discovered objects and the subtlety of fragile gold plates from which they were made. These two points indicate that plaques and medallions were intended to be sewn onto fabric not used in everyday life. In the burial chambers of the Parthian nobility of the first centuries of our era, discovered at the archaeological site of New Nisa, various small stamped plaques of clad gold were found. Therefore, it is quite possible that the old custom of sewing such gold ornaments on funeral fabrics was inherited here by the early Christians, who introduced their new symbolism (Masson, 1956, p. 47).

In 1930, local lore scientist I. G. Egorov raised a piece of stamped ceramic tile with a relief image of a cross with blades expanding towards the end on the surface of the ancient Merv settlement Gyaur-kala. In the free field between them there are four small crosses with forked ends. This entire composition is surrounded by an oval border with embossed disks and oblique notches, and is inscribed in a plaquette of presumably octagonal shape (Fig. 40). According to the manufacturing technique and the quality of the clay, the found terracotta tiles are dated to the early Middle Ages (Pilipko, 1968).

A similar whole tile, but quadrangular (8.2×7.2 cm) was discovered during the work of YuTAKE on Gyaur-Kala in 1962 (Fig. 41). "On it," writes M. E. Masson, – in an oblong oval in the form of two rings with circles enclosed between them, a slightly relief cross is placed, but not straight, conveying the historical instrument of the crucifixion, but rather symbolic, as if in the form of a four-pointed decoration. Its lower part is somewhat elongated, the upper and side parts are of the same size. All four ends in bells, the paired diverging ends of which are equipped with circles. Below on both sides of the cross are two ornaments, possibly symbolic. In general, we have before us one of the variants of a typical Nestorian cross. However, this object in itself does not determine that any of the Christian architectural ruins found in Merv belong to the Nestorians, since it is not associated with them, but was raised from the surface

Fig. 40. Merv, Gyaur-kala. Terracotta tiles. Drawing (Pilipko, 1968, p. 25)

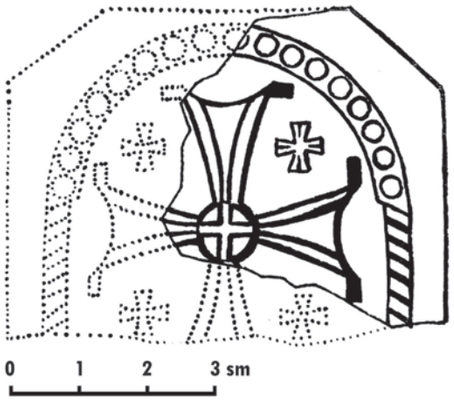

Fig. 41. Merv, Gyaur-kala. Terracotta tiles. Drawing (Masson, 1978, p. 51)

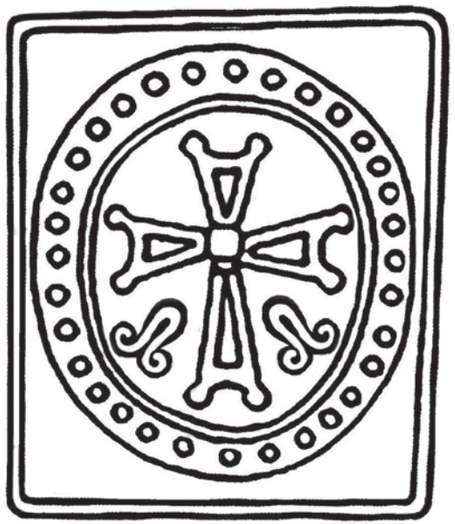

Fig. 42. Ak-tepe near Artyk station, Southern Turkmenistan. Images on bullas (Gubaev, 1977, p. 69)

of the earth in the settlement, to the west of excavation No. 7" (Masson, 1978, p. 51)

Earlier, in 1955, among the ruins of a settlement of the 5th–6th centuries, at the site of Munon-Depe in the northern part of the Murghab oasis, a fragment of the neck of a korchaga-khum of the 5th–6th centuries was found with a Nestorian cross scratched there (Masson, 1956, p. 48).

In 1964 and 1971, during excavations of the early medieval Ak-Depe castle, located 4 km northwest of the Artyk railway station in the Kaakhka district of the Ashgabat region, numerous bullae were found – clay seals with seal impressions, which were used to seal legal documents and bales with goods intended for for wholesale. Some of them contain signs and plots related to Christianity: the image of an equilateral Nestorian cross (Gubaev, 1977, P. 69), the plot of "Daniel in the lions' den" (Gubaev, 1971, p. 47) and others (Fig. 42). On some bullae from Ak-Depe, dating from the late Sasanian period (5th–7th centuries), the names of localities associated with southern Turkmenistan are read – Serakhs and Apavert (Lukonin, 1971, pp. 50–51). These finds, as well as the numerous seals of the Sassanian period with the image of a cross and their imprints on bulls, found in other places, testify to certain legal rights enjoyed by Christians living in different regions of the Sassanian Empire (Borisov, 1939, pp. 235–242).

In 1993, on the territory of the Erk-Kala settlement (the earliest citadel of Old Merv), employees of the International Merv Project found a ceramic mold (matrix, *kalyp, galyp* in local terminology) for casting of equal-ended crosses (Fig. 43). This find was made in a layer of the seventh century directly on the floor in one of the excavated rooms. The mold (galyp) was made by grinding the edges of a Sasanian ceramic jug and carving it on the same surface so that it could be cast simultaneously two different objects. One of them, apparently, has the shape of a symmetrical leaf with small, simple, equal in

length cross-shoulders ("Greek crosses") at the ends. The second is a cross (2.1×1.7 cm) with equilateral arms, a pair of small spots at the tip of each arm and five more spots on the cross itself. This is the first such mold found in Merv, although stone jewelry molds of a similar casting principle are also known from other localities (for example, Pugachenkova, G. A., Rtveladze, E. V. and Kato, K., eds., 1991, p. 321, No. 303). The metal used in the Merv form is unknown. Perhaps it was bronze: it was a bronze pendant in the form of a "Greek cross", but without spots, that was excavated at Qasr-i-Abu Nasr, Sassanid site in the south of Iran (Whitcomb, 1985, 176, 178–9, Fig. 66k). The form of the cross is consistent with the late Sasanian date indicated by its location: parallels with the sixth century can be found in the Byzantine world, and more complex types are found on stucco slabs of the eighth and ninth centuries in churches in Lower Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf (Okada, 1990, 1992 cf. also Wilkinson, 1974, P. 335, 362, No 200). Small, simple "Greek crosses" and "Latin crosses" (i. e., crosses with an elongated lower arm), often resting on a base, are also sometimes found on Sasanian glyptics, sometimes associated with Christian personal names (Simpson, 1994, p. 68). This find added to the still meager list of solid archaeological evidence of the rich Christian history of Merv.

Fig. 43. Ceramic mold from Erk-Kala. Mary Museum of Local History. Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2009

The most convincing confirmation of the presence of an influential Christian community in Merv in the first half of the 5th century is the copper coins of the local minting of the reign of Yazdegerd I (399–420) with an image of an equilateral cross framed by typical Sasanian developing ribbons on the reverse.

(Loginov, Nikitin, 1993, p. 272. Fig. 11, No. 10–29). In Sassanid numismatics, this is the only known case when non-Zoroastrian symbols appear on coins (even copper, municipal minted) (Fig. 44). This could only happen under Yazdegerd I, who was distinguished by great religious tolerance (Nikitin, 2015, p. 167).

Finally, among the archaeological materials stored in Ashgabat in the collections of the Institute of History and Archeology of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, there are two kairaks, which M. E. Masson first saw in 1929 in the exposition of the Ashgabat Museum of Local Lore without etiquette and any explanatory text. He determined that both stones fall under the typology of Nestorian tombstones found in the Semirechye. Many years later, he found them in the museum's depository, measured them, removed the stampings from the front side and sent them to I. M. Dyakonov. He handed them over to decipher the epitaphs to a specialist in the Syriac language A. V. Paikova, who translated the inscriptions. M. E. Masson gave a detailed description of these two kairaks

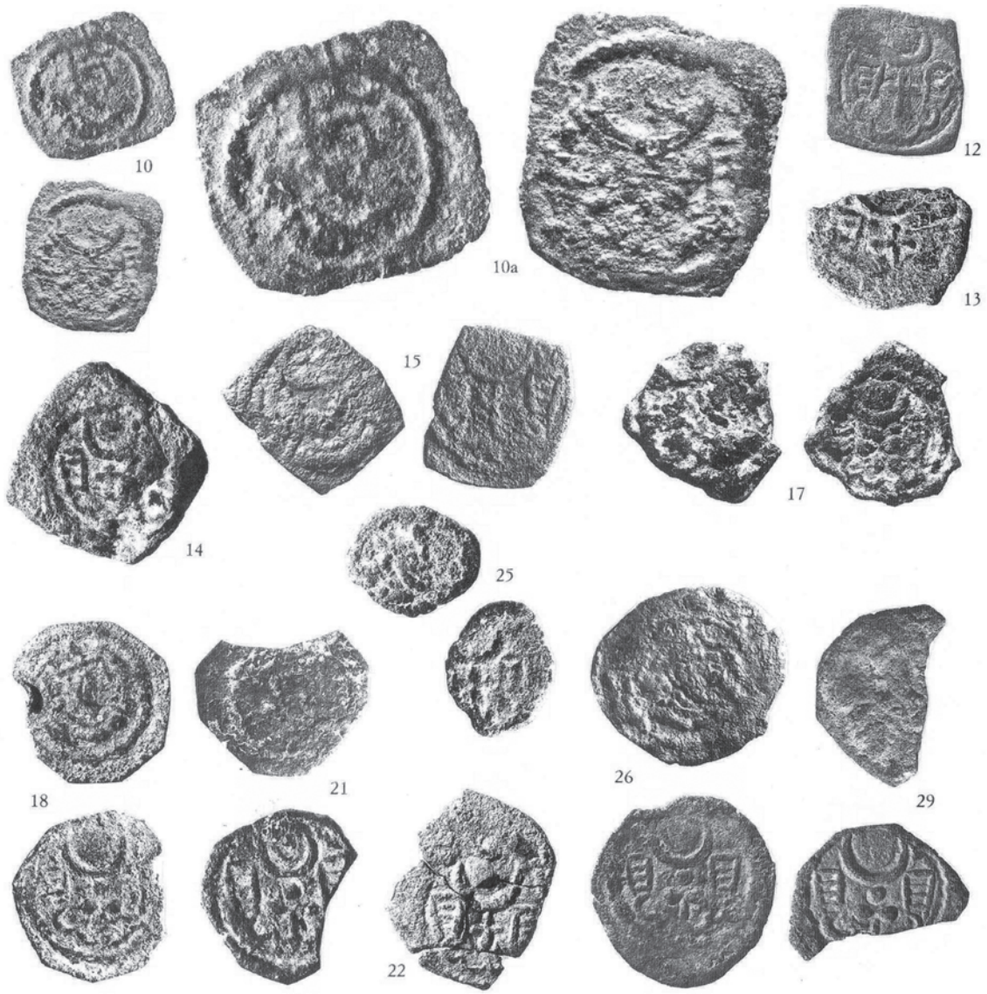

Fig. 44. Coin of Yazdegerd I (Loginov and Nikitin, 1993)

and tried to trace their path from the Semirechie to Transcaspian (*Masson*, 1978). The first stone (Fig. 45) measuring 27.5×18.5×0.6 cm contains the inscription *"This is the grave of the boy Petion"*. Subsequently, this stone was published by Mark Dickens in his catalog of stone graves with Syriac inscriptions from the Semirechye (*Dickens*, 2016, p. 121–122)[3]. The second stone (Fig. 46) is 23.5×15.0×0.9 cm in size with the inscription "Alka periodevt" (according to A. V. Paikova), or *"Shlikha Malpana"* (according to

[3] This refers to the "Book of Grace", written in Syriac at the end of the 8th century. Its alleged author is Jesusdena, bishop of the Syrian town of al-Qasra on the Euphrates, near Deir ez-Zor. He collected the acts of life of the saints – the founders of the monasteries of the East. The sirologist Jean-Baptiste Chabot (1860–1948) translated this work into French (Chabot, 1896).

P. J. Borbon). Now a more thorough paleographic analysis of the inscriptions of both stones has been carried out and corrections have been made to their interpretation. It has been established that one of them is from the Pishpek cemetery, the second from Almalyk (*Borbone, Mikheeva*, 2023).

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In the seventh century, the territory of modern Turkmenistan was conquered by the Arabs, in the thirteenth century by the Mongols, in the late fourteenth century by the Timurids. Despite the almost absolute dominance of Islam, there continued to exist small groups of Christians of various persuasions. In Northern Turkmenistan (the western, left-bank part of Khorezm), in contrast to the southern regions, where Nestorians predominated, Orthodoxy spread from Byzantium through Northern Cis-Caspian region in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. The Khorezm (Khvalis) bishopric was part of the Doros (Crimean) metropolia in the eighth century. The Christians of Khorezm defended its capital Gurganj from the Arabs in 712 and from the Mongols in 1221. The last traces of Christianity in this area date back to the fourteenth century. The Armenian statesman and historian Hetum Patmich (Gaiton), the author of the essay "The Flower Garden of the Stories of the Lands of the East", written in Old French and Latin and presented to Pope Clement V in 1307, talking about Khorezm, noted: "In this kingdom live certain Christians, called "Sogds", who have a special dialect and literacy and are subordinate to the Patriarch of Antioch. In church they sing in various ways, worship the Body of Christ and follow the Greek rites. However, their language is by no means Greek" (*Travel Book* 2006, p. 221). Belonging to the Antiochian Orthodox Church indicates that the Christians of Khorezm were not Nestorians, but Melkites or Jacobites (Bartold, 1964, p. 286).

Fig. 45. Kairak N-310 Collections of the Institute of History and archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan Photo: Vladimir Artemiev, 2006

Fig. 46. Kairak N-2 Collections of the Institute of History and archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan Photo: Ruslan Muradov, 2022

In Northern Khorasan of the post-Mongolian period, territorially identical to Southern Turkmenistan, separate groups of Christians, judging by written sources, still remained not only in Merv, but also in such cities as Serakhs, Abiverd, Nisa until their decline and desolation after the 15th century. Around that time, they disappeared everywhere in the territory of present-day Turkmenistan.

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